

DISCOURSES

CONCERNING THE

Perfections of GOD;

IN WHICH HIS

HOLINESS, GOODNESS,

AND OTHER

MORAL ATTRIBUTES,

Are EXPLAINED and PROVED;

The FOUNDATIONS of True RELIGION,

CONSISTING

In the FEAR and LOVE of GOD, in
OBEDIENCE to, and TRUST in him,

Are Illustrated and Established.

By JOHN ABERNETHY, M.A.

VOLUME II.

THE THIRD EDITION.

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Printed for H. WHITRIDGDE, D. BROWNE, J. WHISTON
and B. WHITE, J. WARD, W. JOHNSTON, P. DAVEY
and B. LAW, and M. and T. LONGMAN.

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CONCERNING THE

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IN WHICH HIS

HOLINESS, GOODNESS

AND

MORAL ATTRIBUTES

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The Power of Religion

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Obedience to, and Trust in him,

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M. DCC. LXXX.

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SER-

(1)

S E R M O N I.

Moral Agency explain'd, and in what
Sense it is to be attributed to God.

Rev. xv. 4.

*Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify
thy Name? for thou only art Holy.*

OF all our inquiries concerning the su-
preme Being, none are more impor-
tant than those which relate to his
moral Character; for that is the immediate
foundation of our duty to him, and our
hopes from him. An intelligent Agent, pos-
sessed of an eternal immutable existence, al-
mighty Power, and infinite Knowledge,
might be an object of speculation which
would naturally end in distrust and horror:
But perfect rectitude, equity, and goodness,
are considered as practical principles, which
so determine his views, and direct the mea-
sures of his conduct towards other beings, as
to be the object of affections, which we know
are in the human mind, and of the utmost

SERM.
I.

SER M. consequence to its happiness ; the objects of

I. reverence, esteem, love, trust and a desire of imitation. This shews of how great moment, and how worthy of our attention the subject is, which we are now entering upon, namely, the consideration of God's *moral attributes*. In this discourse I will endeavour, first, to shew what clear and rational evidence we have of his *moral agency* in general. 2dly, In what sense, and with what limitations, it is attributed to him. 3dly, To what useful purposes it may be applied for the forming our tempers, and governing our practices.

First, to shew what clear and rational evidence we have of God's *moral agency* in general. Our idea of moral agency arises from an attention to what passes in our own minds. We find in ourselves conscious perception with a self-determining power, and affections to certain objects variously exerting themselves ; all which in some degree, and within a limited sphere, seem to be common with us to other animals. But there is in the mind of man, which the brutal nature appears to be incapable of, a power of reflecting upon affections, its own, or those of other agents, together with the actions proceeding from them, which are necessarily *approved* or *disapproved*, in other words, judged to be
good

in what Sense it is to be attributed to God.

3

good or evil, and become objects of a distinct S E R M.
affection, that, like others, is a spring of ac- I.
tion, influencing and directing our practice.

It is this that makes us moral agents, which is the most important part of our constitution. It implies not only intelligence, free agency, and direct affections to other beings, but affections arising from our reflecting upon characters, affections, and actions morally distinguished, that is, appearing good or evil to our minds, according to a certain invariable standard planted in them. Our highest enjoyment arises from self-approbation, or a consciousness of intire moral affection, and a course of morally good action, so far as human nature can attain to it. And our most intense affection to other beings, accompanied with the greatest, the purest, the most rational pleasure we know, terminates on the same characters in them, manifested by their works.

Now, if *the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made*; if from the powers and capacities of the creatures we justly infer his existence and perfections; particularly, if the conscious intelligence and active powers of some beings formed by him, be a proof of his own self-original intelligence

A 2

and

SERM. and activity, may we not in like manner

I. from the moral powers he has given to mankind and other rational creatures infer his moral agency? especially since this character necessarily appears to our minds the most excellent and amiable, and of all others the most important to a rational happiness. Is it possible for any man who believes God to be the father, the designing cause of spirits, of their intelligence, liberty, and all their other rational faculties and enjoyments, to doubt whether he himself is possessed of intelligence, liberty, and rational enjoyment? Whether since he has indued them with a power of self-reflection, particularly, of reviewing their own affections and actions, and judging concerning their rectitude, his own actions and the principles from which they proceed, be not the object of his own understanding and attention? Whether having annexed the highest enjoyment to their self-approbation upon this review, and made their principal happiness to depend upon it, he possesses the like, or a more exalted enjoyment in the approbation of his own actions and principles of action? And this being the sum of what we mean by moral-agency, can we doubt whether God be a moral agent?

Another

in what Sense it is to be attributed to God.

5

Another way of apprehending this subject, SERM.
will lead us to the same conclusion. It has I.
been proved, * and must here be supposed, {
that God is the designing cause, the preserver
and governor of the world, and all things in
it; and from the relations and corresponden-
cies of things which he has made, and con-
tinues to uphold, we discern his particular
ends. Now this implies a *Character* or a
Will, a permanent principle determining him
to act after one particular manner, rather than
another. But it has been also proved † that
morality is an eminent part of the human con-
stitution; that is, the mind of man is so fram-
ed, as when it attains to the full exercise of
its rational powers, to be necessarily sensible
of moral obligations, and to have all the de-
termination to satisfy them, which is con-
sistent with the nature of such a being, and
the nature of virtue itself, *i. e.* with free-agency
in an imperfect state: That morality is of the
greatest moment to the perfection and happi-
ness of every individual, and the whole col-
lective body of mankind: And therefore it
must be attributed to our intelligent Creator
as the true cause of it, thereby intending
those very ends, the perfection and happiness
of our nature, which it is naturally apt to

A 3

serve.

* Vol. I,

† Vol. I, Sermon. 3.

SERM. serve. If it be so, it must then, I think, be

I. allowed a just consequence, that it is the will of God, man should practise virtue and abstain from vice, or that he approves the one, and disapproves the other. Is it possible to conceive that he should not be pleased with his intelligent creatures acting agreeably to his own designs, voluntarily fulfilling the law of their nature; and displeased with their wilfully rebelling against it? Since he has made them capable of discerning the end of his constitution, and of acting freely either in pursuance of it, or in opposition to it, to suppose that he is indifferent to the choice and to their course of action, is absurdly to suppose that he is indifferent to the intention of his own works; indeed, to suppose such confusion and inconsistency in his counsels, as cannot be reconciled to any notions of wisdom. Inanimate things are altogether passive in fulfilling his purposes; that is, they are moved and disposed of merely by his sovereign irresistible Will. As they can never be the objects of his dislike, all the complacency he can be supposed to have in them, is properly no more than self-enjoyment, which arises from the exercise and manifestation of his own attributes, and which in proportion to the degree of its perfections, must belong to every

every intelligent nature in a natural and SERM.
happy state. But free agents are the proper ob- I.
jects of his approbation or disapprobation, ac-
cording as they do or do not actively comply
with his will made known to them, and with
that eternal invariable reason by which his
whole administration is conducted. I be-
lieve it is scarcely in our power when we think
seriously, to imagine that the most perfectly
wise Being is not pleased with his creatures
choosing to conform themselves to the wis-
dom of his counsels, and displeased with such
as obstinately set themselves in opposition to
his will, though we ought never to impute
to him any thing like that passion, which
in our weak minds accompanies resentment
or aversion. But it may be said, that by the
same reasoning, our natural actions, such as
eating and sleeping, are agreeable to the will
of God ; because they are the means he has
appointed us to use for preserving our lives.
Be it so. As natural governor of mankind,
it is his will we should use the necessary means
for the preservation of our lives ; as governor
of moral agents, it is his will they should
conduct themselves with a regard to moral
deficiencies *. Therefore as the governor of
such agents, (which relation is to us most
important and comprehensive, and in it our

A 4

highest

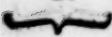
* Mr. A. here means, *moral rectitude*, as well as Deficiency.

SER M. highest interest is immediately concerned,) his

I. character is moral, or in that respect he is a moral agent. Perhaps the clearest notion we can form of God's moral attributes is by resolving them into Benevolence, which in conjunction with infinite wisdom, will fully account for them all. As no principle of action can appear to our minds more amiable, more worthy of an absolutely perfect Being, there is none more justly attributed to the Deity, if we judge by the appearances of design and final causes in the constitution of things, and the government of the world. Now if it be allowed that the Creator of the universe intended the most *absolute good* in the whole of his works, and particularly in the creation and government of rational beings, it will evidently follow that his administration must be moral, or it must be so conducted as in the whole to encourage virtue, which tends to promote the most universal happiness, and discountenances vice, which is naturally productive of misery. In other words, the supreme Being is *righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*. But in whatsoever manner we endeavour to investigate a subject which is too high for our comprehension, and to range our thoughts concerning the order, connection, and dependence of the divine moral

moral perfections, it is plain, that to the pur-
poses of a practical application, they are to be
considered as dispositions or principles, (I do
not say the same as in us, but something ana-
logous to them and which we conceive in
that manner,) determining him to act accord-
ing to moral differences, and with a regard to
them. As inferior agents are called just, and
good, and true, because their temper and their
conduct are agreeable to the rules of righte-
ousness, goodness, and veracity; the same
characters are ascribed to the supreme Being,
and on the same account, tho' in a more ex-
alted sense, and without any degree of im-
perfection. Our disposition even of the vir-
tuous kind have their weaknesses. They rise
and fall according to the measure of our know-
ledge, and the diversity of lights in which
the objects appear. They are sometimes cool-
ed by the influence of other affections and
passions in our nature; and sometimes attend-
ed with perturbation; from which and all
other infirmities the absolutely perfect divine
nature is wholly free. But a constant, uni-
form, and invariable rectitude, or a regard to
right and moral goodness, and opposition to
evil or moral turpitude, is what we attribute to
God, and have as clear and distinct ideas of it
as of any perfections which belong to him.

SERM. I have said that God's moral attributes are

I.  dispositions or principles analogous to what we call dispositions in our selves, determining him to act according to moral differences, that is, to act freely, but constantly and invariably in the way which he approves, in opposition to that which he does not approve. There must therefore be something in the divine mind which constitutes this difference. Philosophers are not agreed in their opinions concerning the foundation upon which the distinction made by the mind of man between moral good and evil with approbation and disapprobation, is to be explained. Whether by reducing them to *truth* and *falsehood*; or by a moral *fitness* and *unfitness* arising from the invariable relations of things which necessarily appears to the understanding; or by an implanted *moral sense* which distinguishes its proper objects, as the external senses distinguish theirs. How then shall we pretend to assign the cause of this difference in the supreme mind which is so little known to us? But how little soever we know of God, there are some things which we are sure belong to him in common with other beings, tho' in a more perfect manner than as they are possess'd by them. We attribute existence to him as we do to the creatures, tho' his existence

ence has the peculiar characters of *eternal* and *necessary*, of which we have but very inadequate Ideas. We are conscious of intelligence in our selves, and the knowledge of some truths; and we cannot help ascribing the same to the Deity, notwithstanding the infinite disparity which there is between his knowledge and ours. And in like manner as moral powers and enjoyments are the greatest glory and happiness of our nature, we cannot avoid attributing them to him, tho' he possesses them in a manner which transcends our comprehension. If however, we conceive benevolence in the Deity to be the great, indeed the sole spring, of his Actions which terminate on other beings, this gives a plain reason why he has an invariable regard to moral rectitude in all his ways and works; namely, because his perfect understanding sees the necessary connection it always has with the greatest Good in the whole, which is his ultimate end.

Supposing our necessary discernment of moral good with approbation, and moral evil with disapprobation, to be founded in a *Sense*, — This being the effect of a voluntarily divine Constitution, may be alledged to furnish an objection against our inferring from such a sense in us, that the same is in God himself;

as

S E R M.
I.

SERM. as in a seemingly parallel case it must be

I. acknowledged he has not such sensible perceptions, nor pleasure and pain from them, as we have by the external senses, which are, equally with the moral sense, to be attributed to his appointment. But between these two cases, however in some respects resembling each other, there is a great and manifest disparity. The external senses have plain marks of infirmity upon them, whereby they evidently appear to be below the transcendent excellence and perfection of the supreme Being : They serve only the purposes of a weak condition : They convey the notices of things, (and by the frame of our bodily organs they must be very imperfect notices,) to a Spirit which is nearly allied to, and depends in the exercise of its power upon, a frail body. The ideas receiv'd by them are very inadequate; not true and full representations of the nature of things, but some of their qualities and effects, principally relative to the purposes of our animal constitution. And therefore they cannot, without gross absurdity, be attributed to the supreme most perfect mind, whose knowledge is independent on all occasions and events; who sees not causes by their effects, but effects in their causes; not the external appearances only, but by immediate in-

intuition, the intimate essences of all things; SERM.
I.
and whose condition is infinitely above every

kind and every degree of weakness or indigence. But on the contrary, a sense of moral rectitude, especially pure benevolence into which it may be ultimately resolved, cannot but appear to have an absolute excellence in it, worthy of the most perfect nature: Nay, we cannot look upon any Agent as truly amiable without it. It does not suppose the least degree of imperfection; nor is to be conceiv'd as ordain'd to a higher end, but constitutes its own chief end; is the immediate foundation of the highest enjoyment we can apprehend any intelligent nature capable of; and esteem'd by all rational beings merely for its own sake: Or as some learned men speak, (tho' I think not very clearly,) it seems to have a necessary foundation in the eternal reason of things. And upon the whole, so much of this sense as is engraven upon our hearts, may well be accounted the finishing part of the divine image in our nature.

What has been said may be sufficient to answer the objection; but that which was last mention'd concerning the external senses, will lead us to a distinct proof of the moral-agency and rectitude of the Deity. Tho' we cannot say, in general, that whatever sense there is
in

SERM. in us, the same must be in God ; on the con-

I. trary, whatever imperfection there is in any of our senses, it must not be attributed to him; for there is and necessarily must be an imperfection in the effect which is not in the voluntary, designing, cause ; yet this must be allow'd as a true principle, that whatever real perfection, (i. e. capacity either of communicating or enjoying happiness,) there is in man, or any creature, the same is in God, or a superior perfection analogous to it. And therefore it is justly infer'd even from our external senses, that since We perceive by them, which is a perfection above the state of inanimate nature, He also perceives, tho' in a manner altogether free from the weakness which belongs to our manner of perceiving. *He that planted the ear shall he not hear ? he that formed the eye shall he not see ? he that teacheth man knowledge shall he not know ?* * that is, since God is the author of that knowledge which we have by our senses, or otherwise, whatever we can discern in our imperfect way, he knows more perfectly. In like manner the judgment of moral differences which is in the mind of man, being derived from God the same is in him more perfectly ; and moral rectitude being the highest excellence which the

* Psal. xciv. 9, 10.

the human nature is capable of, (raising it not SERM.
only above the inanimate, but all the other I.
animal kinds,) it must be in the original fountain of all excellence, without any of the infirmities which cleave to it in us.

It is true, a great part of this reasoning only proves directly and immediately, that God knows and approves moral good, and disapproves moral evil. But as it is *that* which essentially constitutes moral-agency in general, it is sufficient to establish the rectitude or moral perfections of the Deity; especially, so far as is necessary to settle in our minds a sense of indispensable moral obligations from a regard to him. Indeed in imperfect beings, mere approbation of virtue is not enough to make a virtuous character; because we know by experience, that the dispositions and practice are not always agreeable to it. Men are often hurried by irregular propensities and passions into those pursuits which are contrary to the calm dictates of their understandings; and rashly do, nay sometimes thro' the prevalence of vicious habits continue in doing, what upon reflection their own judgments disapprove. But this can never be the case of a perfectly wise Being, infinitely above all intellectual and moral infirmities, above the possibility of being surpris'd or misled, or of
any

SERM. any discord between his understanding and

I. affections. And therefore if God approves moral good and disapproves evil, it follows that moral rectitude is his true character, and the invariable principle by which his actions are directed. I proceed,

2dly, To consider in what sense, and with what limitations, moral agency is attributed to God. It is evident that the practice of virtue, and the obligation to it, differs according to the diversity of conditions wherein agents are placed. That may be the indispensable duty of one, which is not required from, nor is indeed practicable by, another more perfectly righteous and good Being, in circumstances intirely different. Gratitude is unquestionably due to a benefactor; so that we can scarcely believe there is any goodness at all in a mind which is not disposed to make affectionate acknowledgments, or suitable returns, for favours received. Patience and equanimity is an important part of a virtuous character in distress. Absolute resignation to the will of a perfectly wise and good superior, is undoubtedly required from those, who being imperfect in wisdom and goodness, are in a state of intire subjection to him, and necessarily depend upon him. But tho' all these, and others which might be mentioned, are
eminent

eminent virtues in men, and absolutely necessary to a good moral character, yet the obligation of them evidently arises from the imperfection and indigence of our state, to which there is nothing parallel in the infinitely perfect and independent condition of the supreme Being ; and therefore they can be no part of his moral rectitude. *Who hath given to him that he should recompense it ?* None of his creatures, (and all things in the world are his creatures,) can be supposed to lay him under any previous obligations by beneficence, or to have independent rights. There is no wisdom or goodness above his own to trust in ; no superior authority to which he owes submission : He is far out of the reach of sufferings, or the least degree of unhappiness. And therefore, the virtues which have a large share in a good human character, and indeed the greatest part of the moral system, as accommodated to our dependent and imperfect state, can have no place in the perfections of the Deity, or be any otherwise attributed to him, than as by his authority he enjoins, and by his perfect rectitude, wisdom, and goodness, approves them. Of righteousness, as practised by him, we must form an idea, abstracting from all kinds of subjection or indigence as much as possible ; but remembering, on the

SERM. contrary, the absolute supremacy of his dominion, the glorious immutable excellence of his nature, and felicity of his condition. Still however, it ought to be received and inviolably maintain'd, as a moral certain principle and of the utmost importance, that he is a *moral agent, a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he*; acting towards his creatures, not in the way of absolute sovereignty and arbitrary dominion; disposing of them as he pleases without any regard to what is fit and reasonable, equitable and good; dispensing natural good and evil, or happiness and misery, merely as he will; not always willing, and therefore not always doing, what is in itself best, and determining by his sole despotick power the measures of what is called right and wrong, independently on the nature and reason of things, or moral fitness and unfitness; not acting thus, I say, but always and uniformly from an inward principle, according to the methods of moral rectitude and goodness apparent to his own most perfect understanding. Upon no other foundation can he appear amiable to the human mind. For a sense of moral rectitude with high approbation is indelibly impressed upon it; and it is not possible for us to esteem any intelligent being supposed to be destitute of that Perfection.

tion. Religion therefore, or the practice of SERM. virtue from a regard to the Deity essentially I. founded in good affections to him, must rise or fall ; nay it must be or not be, according to the notions we have of his moral character : And 'tis certain that nothing has so much tended to corrupt it, as men's enormous opinions concerning that article.

To form as complete a notion of this subject as the narrowness of our capacity will allow, we may reflect on the order and connection of moral qualities in the human mind ; and from thence take our rise to the consideration of the same attributes in other agents endued with them, and even the supreme Being himself. We know that in ourselves there are various particular affections of the virtuous kind accompanied with approbation ; such as gratitude, compassion, natural affection, &c. which are principles of self-approved action, without a design'd reference to any other principal or higher end. But there is also another principle, namely, benevolence, to which the virtuous instincts before mentioned, and others like them, are subordinated ; and the mind is justified to itself in restraining and regulating their exercise by its direction. It will appear at first sight to any considerate person, that gratitude, natural affection, and

SERM. compassion, must give place to the greatest
 I. public good, or most general happiness, which
 is the immediate object of benevolence. This,
 therefore is the principal, the most comprehensive,
 and the controuling moral affection in our minds;
 which will be further confirm'd, if we inquire into the
 reasons and ends of all the virtuous affections. If the
 question be, *why are compassion and gratitude planted
 in the human nature?* The answer is, because they
 tend to the good of the whole. But if it be, *Why
 have we universal benevolence, or a disposition to
 promote the good of the whole?* No answer can be
 given, but that so our nature is constituted, and so
 is the will of its author. From this idea of our own
 moral frame, if our thoughts ascend to superior agents,
 and even to the eternal absolutely perfect Being, as
 we cannot avoid apprehending an order and connection
 in his moral attributes, we shall find ourselves led to
 conceive of them in the same manner. It is no
 presumption to inquire into the reasons and ends of
 the divine actions, since in many instances he has
 laid them open to our inquiry; and this is a part of
what he hath shewed us, which may be known of him.
 If therefore we ask, *Why has he planted kind
 affections in the human nature? Why has he
 given us excellent moral laws? Why does he*
often

often interpose to relieve the distressed? Why does he bear long with many of his offending creatures? Why does he reward virtue and

punish vice?—all which belong to his moral administration, and are, in our way of thinking, refer'd to distinct moral principles or perfections in him, as beneficence, pity, long-suffering, justice. The answer to all is, that such is his conduct, because thereby he promotes in the wisest and most effectual manner, the greatest absolute good of the whole rational creation. If it be ask'd farther, *What is the reason of his acting from benevolence, and what superior end is the greatest absolute good, or the most universal happiness subordinated to?* No answer can be given. Here then we must rest; and there seems to be no error in conceiving that the greatest good, or most universal happiness, is the ultimate end of the Deity, and pure benevolence the ultimate determination (if it may be so called) of the divine mind.

From what has been said, I think we may infer that *benevolence*, the noblest and most excellent moral affection, is to be attributed to God in the strictest and most proper sense. Other moral principles, as justice, mercy, faithfulness, which we cannot help thinking inferior, because they ultimately

SERM. refer to benevolence, and its immediate object is their last end, These we also ascribe to God, but in a more improper sense. They are so many distinct qualities or principles of action in the human mind; accompanied each of them severally with a sense of excellence and approbation, which is wisely ordered by the author of nature to animate us to that diligence in the good works they tend to produce, which the more general calm virtuous principle would not be sufficient for without them; and because our weak understandings could not always discern the connection between them, and the ultimate end of virtuous action. But these reasons do not affect the supreme Being; and therefore there is no need of supposing distinct moral affections in him, tho' we apprehend his moral attributes in that manner, being led to it by the analogy it bears to the constitution of our own nature. Nor does there appear any inconvenience in this way of thinking, provided we preserve always in our minds a just sense of the divine absolute perfection, infinitely above the infirmity which accompanies particular affections in us. But however we distinguish, or do not distinguish, the perfections comprehended in the moral rectitude, or holiness of the divine nature, 'tis plain that it is not,

not, nor can be universally practised in the same way as by any other being, or brought down to the standard of inferior virtue. It is the rectitude of a superior in every respect; and consists in what is more strictly call'd goodness and justice, which I propose afterwards particularly to consider; Goodness diversified in its exercise, according to the condition and circumstances of the objects, comprehending grace, mercy, patience, and righteousness, whereby he is universally inclined to render to all his rational creatures, according to their works.

But the principal exercise of the divine rectitude in the administration of providence, as it relates to us, and which ought very sensibly to affect our minds, consists in what I have already shewn to be most directly prov'd from the law of our nature, consider'd as a divine constitution, namely, that God approves *good* and disapproves *evil* in the dispositions and works of his rational creatures. Tho' his actions are not to be brought down to the standard of inferior moral agents, and their virtues, suited to the imperfection of their state, are too low to be practis'd by him in kind; and tho' his administration, as the supreme infinitely wise and powerful ruler, (in itself exactly agreeable to goodness and justice,

SERMON. fice, and so it will appear in the last issue of

I. things,) is too deep for our narrow understanding to comprehend, and therefore we cannot take upon us to judge in particular circumstances, how these perfections are to exert themselves, and what they require to be done: Yet this is very plain, and ought to make a deep impression upon our minds, that the iniquities of man, and all other moral agents, are always an abomination to him, and that *he beholds the righteous with a pleasant countenance*; That as his eye is always on our behaviour, and the most secret of our actions, even our thoughts, are not hid from his view, he is not a careless indifferent spectator, but pleas'd with what we do right, and displeas'd with what we do amiss. This shews that the omniscience of the Deity, *his searching the hearts and trying the reins of the children of men*, is not a point of meer speculation, but in conjunction with that glorious attribute of his nature, his perfect purity, his unchangeable love of righteousness, and aversion to moral turpitude, renders him the just object of our highest veneration, and makes it our most important concern to be approved by him. So it is, even abstracting from the future consequences of his favour or displeasure as our judge; for the mind of
man

man is so fram'd, as naturally to desire the SERM.
esteem of other intelligent moral agents, and I.
the more perfect their characters are, the more {
solicitous we shall be to obtain their approba-
tion. Above all, the universal and most ac-
curate inspection of that Being who is per-
fectly free from the least moral defect, must
be regarded by the mind which believes and
seriously attends to it, as a powerful motive
to the avoiding of all evil, and the sincere prac-
tice of every virtue. But this has still the
greater force, when we consider that as the
consciences of men necessarily approve the
whole work of God's law written in their
hearts as pure and righteous, and as this can-
not but raise in us a high veneration for the
law-giver, so his inviolable regard to rectitude,
which makes our conduct now the object of
his special attention, gives us the greatest rea-
son to believe he will hereafter call us to ac-
count.

It may be a very proper and useful illustra-
tion of this subject, to consider it in the light
in which the scriptures set it. One great ex-
cellency of these sacred books, as a rule of
religion, is, that they contain noble descrip-
tions of the Deity, tending to form in our minds
the most becoming sentiments concerning the
transcendent perfection and dignity of his na-
ture,

SERM. ture, and glory of his supreme government,

I. and the most apt to excite in us pious and devout affections. Particularly, they represent that which I have been endeavouring to prove and to explain, his moral attributes in general, or that perfect rectitude which comprehends them all under the character of *holiness*, as the object of our highest admiration and most profound reverence, which in a peculiar sense they ascribe, nay, appropriate to him, as in the text: *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy Name, for thou only art Holy?* In like manner, the angels are represented in vision to the prophet *Isaiab* as in *God's train* which filled the temple, that is, as attending in their ministry when he reveals his will to men, and governs them according to that revelation: And on that occasion they celebrate his glory under the same denomination, as expressing the most proper idea we can have of the object of our worship, saying, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.* It is therefore the incommunicable title of the true God, denoting his incomparable moral excellence, which the prophets often gave him, *the Holy one of Israel.* Other persons, 'tis true, and even inanimate things, are called holy in scripture. But *things* are so denominated only because of their being

ing used in the external religious services performed by men: and *persons* in a more proper, but far inferior sense, so that the glory of the purest and most exalted created beings is represented as sinking into nothing, when set against original and immutable holiness. *The heavens are not clean in his sight, and he chargeth his angels with folly.* But when this designation is given to God, it means that which is the principal and peculiar object of reverence; which ought to be held sacred by all intelligent creatures, and claims their humble adoration on its own account, without reference to any thing else as a superior excellence, or its original pattern, and it is the universal perfect rectitude of the divine nature.

Now the *holiness* of God, that most eminent character given him in scripture, comprehending all his moral excellencies, and proposed as the just object of our religious fear, and the perfect pattern to which we should always endeavour to conform our temper and behaviour;—The *holiness* of God, I say, is celebrated as consisting in such particulars as you will see are imported in his approbation of good and disapprobation of evil; his moral character, as it appears by the evidence of reason, consisting in an eternal distance from every kind and degree of sin and unrighteousness,

SERM.
I.

SERM. nefs, in an utter abhorrence of all manner
 I. of moral impurity. *Thou art* (says the prophet) * *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*; that is, otherwise

than with detestation, and in a constant opposition to wicked men, who continue obstinately and impenitently in their wickedness.

† *Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee; the foolish shall not stand in thy sight, thou hatest the workers of iniquity.* Sin is constantly re-

presented, as that alone, which separates between God and any of his rational creatures, obstructing the channels of his overflowing goodness towards them, and hindering his complacency in them. Whatever benevolence and compassion he has for sinners, (and indeed he has shewn amazing pity to guilty mankind) no consideration can reconcile him to their sins, so as to give them the least degree of countenance or approbation. On the contrary, the scriptures constantly teach, that having distinguished some of mankind by his favour, and honoured them with peculiar privileges, it is not the intention of his grace to indulge them in any evil way; but he has chosen them for this very end, ‡ *that they should be holy, and without blame before him.* § *And if they*

* Habb. i. 13.

† Ps. v. 4, 5.

‡ Eph. i. 4.

§ Ps. lxxxix. 31, 32.

they break his statutes, and keep not his com-
mandments, then will he visit their transgres-
sions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.

SERM.

I.

For, says the prophet, * in the name of God, to the Israelites, *You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities.* Thus is he represented as acting invariably, according to the essential rectitude of his nature, pleased with moral goodness in his creatures, displeased with evil.

Above all, the Gospel, that last and most perfect revelation of the divine will, instead of giving the professors of it any allowance to sin because grace has abounded, (which is an injurious imputation cast upon it by ignorant and impious minds,) its chief design is to establish that great principle, God's moral purity, and to manifest his abhorrence of sin, and inviolable regard to purity and virtue in his reasonable creatures. It was for this he sent his son into the world, *to turn men from their iniquities*, and reduce them to the paths of righteousness. For this the blessed Jesus submitted to the deepest humiliations and most grievous sufferings. *He gave himself* (as St. Paul speaks) *† for his church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, that he might present*

or

it

* Amos iii. 2.

† Eph. v. 26, 27.

SERM. *it to himself a glorious church, not having*

I. *spot or wrinkle, but that it should be holy and without blemish; or as it is elsewhere expressed, he gave himself for us, to redeem us from our iniquities, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.* In all this he is said to have done the will of his father, and glorified him; that is, restored and promoted in the world the cause of virtue and righteousness, which is the glory of God. And his life was the visible image of the divine sanctity, proposed as a familiar example to mankind; for he *was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* And as christianity appears by the character of its author, and by his actions and sufferings, to be a designed evidence of the holiness of God, or of his aversion to sin and his gracious desire to turn men from it, so the institution itself is perfectly pure; it contains the clearest and most lively descriptions of moral virtue, and the strongest motives to the practice of it. It promises, as from God, the kindest assistance to men for making the Gospel effectual *to renew them in the spirit of their minds, and to reform their lives by his spirit, sent down from heaven on purpose to convince the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment; to*
en-

enlighten them who *were in darknes*, and to SERM.
turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to I.
strengthen sincere but weak converts to true
religion, unto all obedience and long-suffer-
ing patience; to enable them to resist tempta-
tion; to *abound in the fruits of righteousness,*
and perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Thus it is plain, that it was the design of
the christian Religion to give all men, and all
intelligent beings who should come to the
knowledge of it, a convincing proof of the
holiness of God; that is, to confirm this most
important and necessary truth, (which the light
of nature also teaches,) that he is a being of
the most perfect purity; who is displeased
with all moral turpitude, and has an inviola-
ble regard to virtue in his reasonable creatures.
And of this we have still a farther evidence in
the account which the scriptures give us of
the divine judgment, or distribution of rewards
and punishments, which shall be impartially
rendered to all men according to their works.
As the creatures who are represented as sur-
rounding his throne, continually ministering
to him and standing before him that is, his
chief favourites, and who have the nearest
admission to his blissful presence, are perfectly
innocent, free from all sinful stains and de-
fects; so mankind in their lower sphere and
more

SERM. more distant situation, are regarded by him

I.  not according to outward considerations, (such as their nations, their tribes and families, their worldly condition,) for he regardeth the rich no more than the poor, the external appearance of their persons ; nor yet according to their forms of devotion, and shew of religious profession ; (outward privileges may aggravate sins, they can atone for none,) but they are only regarded by the righteous God according to the integrity of their hearts, and the goodness of their actions. In this he acts with a steady impartiality, as the apostle *Peter* excellently speaks, and agreeably to the whole tenor of the sacred writings, * *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* And not only does the unbiass'd rectitude of their judge determine their condition according to their general moral character, and the general tenor of their moral actions ; but the degrees of his favour and displeasure, and the effects of both, are in exact proportion to the degrees of their moral goodness or evil. *The righteous are his delight, he takes pleasure in them that fear him ; his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is*
per-

* Acts x. 34, 35.

perfect towards him *. And he as reserved SERM.

for them a great happiness to be enjoyed here-
after, *a crown of righteousness and glory.* But I.

that happiness shall be unequal, bearing exact proportion to the degrees of their virtue and useful service in a state of trial; *for he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully, and he that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly* †. On the other hand, the punishment of sinners in the future state shall also be unequal.

For that servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes ‡.

Thus I have shewn what evidence we have from reason of God's moral rectitude, particularly as exercised and constantly manifesting itself towards his creatures in his approbation of virtue and goodness wherever it is found, and his disapprobation of the contrary. And I have also shewn, that the general strain of the scripture declarations upon the same subject is exactly agreeable to this, when they represent *holiness* as the true, essential, distinguishing character of the supreme Being, the very sum of all his adorable and lovely perfections, consisting in an

VOL. II.

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im.

* Chron. xvi. 9. † 2 Cor. ix. 6. ‡ Luke xii. 47, 48.

SER M. impartial and invariable dislike of, and opposi-

I.  fition to all moral impurity, and his perfect complacency in the righteousness and goodness of all moral agents, and their good actions; distinguishing them by his favour, according to the measure of their real goodness. Upon which this reflection naturally arises; that as there is no doctrine of greater importance to the ends of religion and virtue; none which the human mind, upon calm and serious consideration, can more fully rest satisfied in, as in all respects worthy of the best and most excellent of all beings, the just object of their highest love and adoration; none which has a more direct tendency to excite pious and devout affections in our minds, to be the foundation of true and rational religion, and thereby promote the utmost perfection and happiness of the human nature; this, which is the peculiar glory of Christianity above all other pretended revelations, justly recommends it to our esteem, and strongly supports its pretences to a divine original. It remains now that we consider,

3dly, To what useful purposes this doctrine may be applied for the forming of our tempers, and governing our practice. First, the moral rectitude of the Deity intitles him to our highest esteem and veneration. The human
mind

mind is so constituted as necessarily to discern S E R M.
the difference between right and wrong, good I.
and evil, in the dispositions and the conduct of
intelligent beings, and to distinguish them in
its regards, according to that difference. If
a good moral character is represented to us,
abstractly, so that our private interest is not
affected by it in any degree, (as in a distant
part of the world, or even another order of
beings with whom we are not supposed to
have any manner of communication,) yet it
will immediately appear to us amiable; nay,
tho' there be an opposition of interest, and
danger apprehended from it to our selves, the
heart will feel a secret veneration arise for in-
flexible integrity, and an unbiass'd impartial
aversion to all moral deformity. In the im-
perfect measure in which this good temper
discovers itself among men, it is acknowledg-
ed to merit our approbation and our praise.
Superior natures are held more venerable, be-
cause of their greater moral perfection, not
because of their greater power and knowledge,
which, supposing them destitute of good mo-
ral qualities, would render them more dete-
stable; and for this reason evil Dæmons are
the most abhorred of all beings. What ad-
miration then, and honour should we have
in our hearts for original moral excellence, that

SER M. absolutely pure and perfect being, in whose

I. fight the inhabitants of heaven are not clean, because they are not immutably so by the independent perfection of their nature? Every agent of a limited understanding may possibly be misled; that is, he has no absolute security in himself against being drawn into erroneous opinions, and thereby into wrong actions, which diminishes our respect for him in proportion to the apprehensions we have of his fallibility or liability to change. But the rectitude of the Deity is invariable as his essence: He is no more capable of being imposed on by any artifice or misrepresentation from without, than of changing thro' the influence of any infirmity within. This therefore challenges our most peculiar and superlative esteem. *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy.*

It was the great unhappiness, as well as inexcusable folly of the heathens, at least many of them, that they honoured as a sort of Deities those beings, whether real or imaginary, who were of immoral character; so that the most infamous vices among men had their patrons among the Gods. The consequence was, that as their religion corrupted their manners, (for those immoralities, from which disgrace ought to be inseparable, were held

held innocent, yea honourable, being attributed to the objects of adoration, thus vice took deep root and spread far and wide) so their worship itself became a poor, contemptible, and impure thing. For the spirit of the worshipper will always be suitable to the sentiments he has of his God. If they be low, corrupt and vicious, so will his temper be even in his devotion. And so in fact the religion of the Gentiles, instead of raising the minds of men to a divine temper, sunk them beneath humanity; and their rites of service were agreeable to the character of the Gods, and the spirit of the worshippers; they were not only foolish, but obscene and barbarous. But however unwilling some may be to own it, the generality of men in those parts of the world where christianity is known, are indebted to it for juster notions of the Deity, and therefore a moral rational worship. Not to mention its doctrines concerning his other perfections, it has particularly set us right in the great article of his moral character, continually inculcating as a truth most necessary to be believed, that he is Holy; that is, as has been already observed, averse to all kinds of moral evil, and a constant impartial lover of virtue, ready to encourage and reward it in any of his creatures. It ought to be acknow-

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SERM. ledged, that some Christians have wrong ways

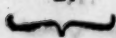
I. of thinking in this point: some profess opinions inconsistent with God's universal impartial rectitude as governor of the world; opinions which represent him as ruling over mankind in an arbitrary way, partial to some, distinguishing them by his favour, and appointing them to happiness, without any consideration of their behaviour; severe against others without any regard to their demerit; as laying great stress upon trifles, offended where there is no moral impurity, as for involuntary mistakes, where there are no ill affections, or for the violation of foolish human decrees; as appeased by insignificant ceremonies, without the real reformation of sinners; nay, as pleased with cruel and barbarous persecution. But these absurd doctrines are not chargeable on the rule of christianity; which, on the contrary, teaches that God is perfectly pure, and impartially righteous in the whole of his administration; and on this account claims for him, what our minds must confess to be due, our highest esteem and honour.

2dly, The firm belief of this principle, which I have endeavoured to prove and explain, and a serious attention to it, must have the greatest influence to promote virtue among men, and to restrain them from all kinds of
moral

moral evil. For what can more rationally induce them to any practice, than that thereby they shall obtain the approbation of the supreme Being? What can be a more powerful dissuasive from any thing, than that it renders them obnoxious to his displeasure? All the motives taken from other considerations relating to the Deity, his sovereign dominion, his almighty power, his omnipresence, his perfect knowledge of our ways, and even our thoughts, all the motives, I say, taken from these considerations, derive their force from *this*. Supposing it to be acknowledged, that he is the great ruler of the universe, that we and all creatures are absolutely subject to his disposal, and that he is continually inspecting our secret purposes, as well as our outward actions; what can all this avail to the forming our dispositions, and directing our practice, unless we know what will please, and what will displease him? But if we are thoroughly convinced, that *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*, and wickedness is an abomination to him, then every relation we bear to him and every one of his perfections, joins in demanding a conformity of our tempers and our lives to his essential rectitude; and all of them taken together lay us under an indispensable obligation, which an attentive mind

SERM.
I.

SER M. cannot but be sensible of. And let us still re-

I.  remember, what was observed before upon this subject, that even abstracting from the consequences to ourselves, that is, the rewards and punishments to be distributed by the judge of our conduct, this motive duly attended to must have a very great force. The desire of honour from other intelligent beings is so strong in the mind of man; a sense of shame accompanies the consciousness of having done amiss before them, and satisfaction arises from having merited their esteem; This desire, I say, is so strong in the minds of men, even where the virtuous affections are weak, that to it principally is owing the decorum observed in their deportment which is open to the views of each other, on the foundation of that sense which is common to them all, of moral good and evil. Scarcely is any one arrived to such a height of impudence, as not to affect secrecy in his crimes, even when the fear of punishment is laid aside. But still the more venerable any presence is on account of reputed moral worth, the more will men be ashamed of base actions, and restrained from committing them. Now the divine presence ought to be, and will be, by those who firmly believe and seriously consider it, regarded
above

in what Sense it is to be attributed to God.

41

above all others, because of absolute purity, SERM.
and because it is universal. I.

There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may bide themselves from God. His eye pierces into the deepest solitude, and sees the secrets of all hearts; and there is no kind of moral turpitude which is not odious to him. He is partial to no corruptions, nor can the least offence against perfect rectitude meet with his approbation, any more than it can escape his notice. The most ingenuous and the most pious minds are sensible of this; they feel an inward shame, remembering their sinful imperfections and failures, which none know but God and their own hearts.

Lastly, the moral perfection of the Deity is the great pattern which we ought to imitate. This is the application which the sacred writers always direct us to make of it, and the principal view with which they insist on that important doctrine. They do not teach us that God is Holy, merely as a point of speculation, nor only to attract our esteem and veneration to him; but chiefly that we should follow his example, *and be holy in all manner of conversation, as he is holy.* It must be acknowledged that the method they take is very rational, and the motive they insist on very
apt

S E R M. apt to work on the human mind. For there

I. seems to be naturally in mankind a proneness to imitation, which is so strong a principle of action that it is exceeding difficult to resist it. Perhaps there is no one greater cause of corruption in morals spreading so universally, as it has been known to do in some parts of the world, against the dictates of reason and conscience, and against the clearest religious instructions, than that it has been recommended by some great examples, whereby the sense of its turpitude gradually wears off, till at last it is thought honourable. Now if this disposition to imitate be so strong that by its influence example prevails, even contrary to the dictates of reason and nature ; what can have a greater tendency to strengthen virtuous affections, which our minds must necessarily approve, than to set before them a perfect pattern of moral rectitude, the proper effect of which is to raise in them an ardent desire of resembling it, as far as their condition will allow ? And this is the true dignity of the rational nature, which every one who partakes of it, will find an inward self-applauding satisfaction in aspiring to.

If we reflect on our own constitution, (and 'tis very becoming such creatures as we are to do so,) there appears a great diversity in it.

One

One part of our nature has an affinity with the SERM.
inferior kinds of living creatures: We have I.

external senses like theirs, and appetites which
determine us to things necessary for the pre-
servation of the animal life, in the same man-
ner as they have. In some of the brutal spe-
cies there are remarkable discoveries of reason-
ing, within a narrow sphere, and upon objects
which fall within the perception of their sen-
ses. 'Tis religion and virtue which makes the
distinction. There is no appearance at all
which leads us to imagine that the lower
kinds of animals have any sense, or capacity
of moral obligations. Here, then, is the pre-
eminence of man above the beasts. By the
body, its senses and appetites, we are allied
to them, and shall perish like them; but by
the knowledge of God and religion, by con-
science, by the devout and generous affections,
and a sense of the dignity and excellence
which is in them, we are related to superior
orders of beings, and even to the supreme. If
this be so, there needs little reasoning to shew
what is worthiest of a man: Whether to be
like the beasts, and live as if we had nothing
in our nature more noble than they; or to
partake of a divine nature, and improve those
powers and affections wherewith our minds
are indued, so as to resemble the perfections
of

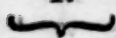
SERM. of God. Let any man who has a just value

I. for his kind, and a sense of the true dignity of human nature, judge then, whether this does not lay him under an obligation to follow holiness and virtue, which above all things enobles humanity, raising it to the similitude even of the highest perfection. No creature has, or can possibly have, the least likeness to God in some of his natural attributes; but as his moral character appears to our minds infinitely amiable whenever we consider it, the capacity of imitating it, is the distinguishing excellence of intelligent natures: The actual likeness to it in virtuous dispositions and practices, is their highest glory and felicity, and every step of their progress in it, is accompanied with high self-enjoyment. Thus it is evident, that as wrong notions of the Deity, which have sometimes prevail'd among mankind, particularly relating to his moral perfections, have above all things tended to corrupt men's morals, and produced very fatal effects in the world; so on the contrary, a just representation of him, as a Being perfectly pure and righteous, has the greatest force, as an example, to promote universal righteousness and goodness.

'Tis certain that the highest moral rectitude of any creature comes far short of the divine, essential,

essential, and original purity. The *Lord God* SERM.
Almighty and the *King of saints* only is holy; I.
and the moral attainments of men in this imperfect state come short of what a created nature is capable of; they come short of innocence or sinless perfection. Yet notwithstanding all the abatements which must be made, not only because of our natural imperfection as finite beings, but moral imperfection, having infirmities whereby we are betrayed into sinful failures, there is a real tho' faint resemblance of the divine holiness, in the virtues of good men. And pursuant to the account which has been given of this perfection in the Deity, his image in men discovers itself by their hearty dislike of all moral turpitude wherever it is found, (whether in others or in themselves,) and their sincere hatred of every false way, even of vain thoughts. And because we are always in danger of being misled, thro' the frailty of nature and the influence of our lower appetites and passions, therefore ought we always to employ ourselves in a careful vigilance, and in the exercise of a strict discipline over these sources of evil in ourselves, aspiring to a greater freedom from their power. The mind that is formed to the imitation of God, habitually inclines to good; the remains of sin are its most grievous burden.

SERM. den. A conquest over moral infirmities yields

I.  it the most sensible pleasure, and is matter of secret self-applauding triumph; and it enjoys its growing liberty with sincere delight. The natural fruit of this disposition will be a resolved abstaining from sin in practice; for no man can be supposed frequently, and of choice, to do what he sincerely hates. Therefore nothing can be more vain than a pretence of holiness in heart, and an abhorrence of sin, which is not justified by a regular conversation.

Tho' it is not to be expected we should attain to the perfection of innocence in this world, yet it is the disposition of those who *follow God as dear children*, and keep his purity always in view as their pattern, to contend for it with ardent desire and constant endeavour, pressing on unwearied in the paths of virtue, and zealously opposing every kind of evil which they are tempted to. Again, the imitation of the divine rectitude will direct us to an abhorrence of all vicious characters, and to an high esteem of all good men. An universal benevolence to mankind, even the worst of them, and a disposition to do them kind offices, such as their condition requires, or renders them capable of, is a God-like temper; but so is a peculiar distinguishing esteem
for

for good men, according to the measure of S E R M.
 their goodness, and an impartial aversion to I.
 obstinate irreclaimable iniquity, wherever it
 appears. As the righteous Lord loveth right-
 eousness, and is angry with the wicked every
 day, so his sincere worshippers follow his ex-
 ample, *for in their eyes a vile person is con-
 temned, but they honour them that fear the
 Lord.*

S E R M O N II.

The Goodness of God, proved from
his Works.

Mark x. 18.

There is none good but one, that is God.

SERM.
II.

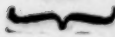
AS *goodness*, in general, is a most amiable subject of meditation, it is impossible for the human heart designedly and deliberately to think of it without pleasure. The goodness of the Deity is in a peculiar manner, above his other perfections, attractive of our highest esteem and delight. They are all excellent in themselves, absolute, independent of any other being, necessary as his existence, and infinite : But beneficence finishes his character, which is the just object of our adoration our reverence and love, the foundation of our hope and confidence in him, and most worthy to be imitated by us, as far as our limited capacity and the frailty of our nature will allow. The consideration of eternity and immensity, of
power

power and wisdom, nay, and of holiness and justice, abstracting from love and kindness, may strike the mind with admiration and awe; but the bounty of God to all sensitive, and especially rational creatures, his opening his hand liberally, and giving them that which is convenient for them, suitable to their several natures,—This inspires the heart of man with hope and joy, excites the best affections, and makes all the rest of the divine attributes appear most lovely.

I intend afterwards more particularly to explain this subject. My present design is to prove that God is good. Some have endeavoured to prove all his moral attributes, and particularly his goodness, from his natural perfections; and their reasoning seems to be very strong. As morality has a necessary foundation in the nature and reason of things, independently on, and antecedently to all will, and positive appointment; (for the essences of things being different, there must be different relations, an agreeableness and disagreeableness of some to others, and particularly a suitableness of certain conditions and circumstances to certain persons, or their characters and qualifications;) So this necessarily appears to the human understanding; and we cannot help thinking it appears to every un-

VOL. II. D derstanding

SERM. derstanding, more or less clearly, according

II.  to the measure of its perfection; and every intelligent agent must of necessity, (not natural but moral, consistent with the most perfect freedom,) direct his actions by that distinction of fit and unfit, so far as it is known to him, unless he be hindered by impotence or wrong affection. Now the supreme cause of all things being absolutely perfect, self-existent, independent, and unchangeable, his understanding infinite, his power almighty; as he discerns all the relations and even possibilities of things; no reason can possibly be imagined why he should not always act according to these invariable respects, which he has made every intelligent creature capable of seeing, and thereby capable of approving and praising his administration. He can never mistake evil for good, or fail in distinguishing the true limits of fit and unfit. There is no superior power to controul or restrain him in doing what he thinks most reasonable to be done. He is infinitely above all indigence, or want of any thing to make him perfectly easy and happy; and therefore his mind cannot be biased by any selfish or partial affections, which are in other agents the sources of offence against the eternal rule of right. In particular, the supreme Being must be

be good, or inclined to communicate happiness, because he is in himself, and was from eternity, perfectly and unchangeably happy, and therefore cannot be supposed to have designed the production of any kind or degree of unhappiness, unless his wisdom should foresee it might be a means of greater good in the end. Nor indeed can it be supposed, that such a Being could have another motive to make any creatures at all than to communicate good in such variety, and always in such proportion, as to his infinite wisdom should seem meet. That God is beneficent also appears from his absolute all-sufficiency, whereby he is at an infinite distance from malice, envy, and all temptations to do evil. For these malevolent dispositions, and every disposition contrary to goodness, as they are known to be tormenting to the mind in which they are seated, so they always proceed, and in their nature must proceed, from weakness and imperfection.

But tho' this reasoning may be very convincing to some attentive persons, yet another, and a larger method of illustrating the subject before us, may be more generally useful, which therefore I shall endeavour in the following discourse; namely, by considering the genuine fruits of goodness apparent in the

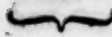
SERM. works and ways of God, or in his constitu-

II. tion of things, and administration of providence. To which purpose it is only necessary to observe, that the evidence of the divine goodness is the same with the evidence of that disposition in any other being, as the principle itself is the same in kind tho' different in the degree of its perfection. If a designing cause actually produces those effects, which in their nature and tendency are beneficial to other beings, and we see no reason to think that he acts upon selfish principles, we cannot help concluding that he is beneficent. Now it has been proved, that God is the supreme intelligent designing cause of all things in the universe; he has disposed its form, fixed its order, the relations, the connexion and dependence of all its parts, and the harmony of the whole; that he continually superintends and irresistibly governs it, being every where present, and every where exercising his power and wisdom. And therefore if in the intire state of things, and series of events, it appears that there are many benefits actually conferred, and much happiness actually communicated to beings which are capable of it, (various happiness suitable to their various natures and conditions, either in their possession, or placed within their reach

reach so that by the proper use of their own SERM.
powers they may attain it; and at the same II.
time they have a sufficient direction as to the
manner of attaining it;) if, I say, these things
be so, and this apparently prevalent in the
constitution of nature, and the administration
of providence, as far as our knowledge
extends, then we do justly infer, that the au-
thor of nature and governor of the world is
good or benevolent.

It is true indeed that a vast variety of crea-
tures in the universe are not proper objects of
beneficence, and therefore the manifestation
of *this*, is not altogether so extensive as of
the other divine attributes. In all the kinds
of inanimate things, from the most magni-
ficent celestial orbs to the lowest pebble or
grain of sand on the earth, the wisdom and
power of the creator are display'd; but they
are capable of no enjoyment, and consequently
the goodness of God can no otherwise *pro-*
perly be said to be manifested in them, than
as they are the means of happiness to sensitive
or intelligent beings. But as we cannot
certainly know, that any part of the universe
is wholly uninhabited by living creatures; and
as its principal parts and appearances have an
evident relation to life, and are useful to its
preservation and entertainment; so this sy-

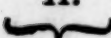
SERM. stem which we are best acquainted with,

II.  would be but very imperfectly understood, and a wrong judgment made of it, if it were considered only as dead nature ; as a curious fabric indeed, but unrelated to, and not made for the use of the animated kinds which dwell in it, and which we cannot avoid thinking to be a superior and more perfect rank of beings. As for the earth, it seems to have been chiefly intended as a dwelling-place for animals, and all its parts and productions principally designed for their conveniency. We cannot take upon us so peremptorily to judge, what the main ends are of those moving globes in our heavens, which do all of them, in common with this terrestrial one, partake of the vital heat and light of the sun ; and which, tho' appearing to our naked eyes very small because of their distance, are really of a vast magnitude. It is not improbable, that as they seem to be well fitted for it by their situation, they are inhabited by rational creatures who there celebrate the praises of their maker, and pay him their homage, being, as we are, the monuments of his bounty. But however that be, we reasonably conclude, that the uses which we see some of the far distant orbs do serve, those the wise author of nature designed they should serve : And
if

if they are of great importance to animal SERM.
and intelligent beings, he is good in appoint- II.
ing them for such uses. Especially the sun,
that glorious orb, the perpetual source of
light and warmth, tho' it may answer ends
above our comprehension, and may be fitted
to other parts of the world in the same way
it is to this we live on, or in different ways;
yet upon the partial view we have of it, and
of its various usefulness to the inhabitants of
the earth, we reasonably judge that it is de-
signed to be beneficial; and that therefore
the maker of it is beneficent.

From what has been said, it appears that
one proper illustration of the present subject
will be, by considering the visible frame of in-
animate nature which falls within our obser-
vation, and its most obvious appearances, as
they relate to animal and rational life, which
afford us a strong convincing evidence of the
Creator's bounty. It has been observed on
another occasion, that the apparent relation
between the parts of the mundane system,
particularly the constant conveyance of light
and heat from the sun to the earth, causing
such a variety of productions on its surface,
and of so manifold use to its inhabitants that
we cannot conceive how they could possibly
subsist without them, (which light and heat

SER M. are so conveniently distributed by means of

II.  the daily and annual revolutions, that all parts of our globe, have, in their turns, such supplies as are necessary for the living creatures which dwell in them,) it has, I say, been observed, that this is a clear evidence of *design* in the frame of the world. But the same argument as fully proves *good design*; that is, a design of doing good to a multitude of sensitive and intelligent beings. Will we call a man beneficent who employs his time, his labour, and treasure, for relieving the indigent, for preserving life, and rendering it comfortable? And shall we not acknowledge him a kind and generous Being, who has so contrived the fabric of the world, and so constantly directs its regular motions, that by them all the species of living creatures upon the earth, and mankind at the head of them, are daily nourished, and have a vast variety of enjoyment? The uniform appearance which there is in the face of nature, and the constant course it keeps, makes the continual, intelligent, and beneficent direction of its author, to be overlooked by those ungrateful and unthoughtful mortals, who stupidly attribute the benefits they constantly receive, to a kind of undefining necessity; whereas to an attentive mind, the power of God appears as much in the

the ordinary works of nature, as in the most S E R M.
miraculous interpositions. His bounty ap- II.

pears by its constant, yet voluntary communication; so much the more to be admired, because thus it is manifested to be a never-failing principle: And the sun's visiting the earth every day, is a daily fresh instance of his favour; the suspension whereof, for a very short time, which he could as easily effect, (and goodness only prevents it,) would involve all the animals of the earth in the utmost horror, nay inevitable ruin.

Again; if we look into the constitution of this lower world itself, which can only be attributed to the will of the wise Creator as its cause, it will lead us by the same sort of reasoning to the acknowledgment of his liberality. There is an admirable correspondence between the parts of the terraqueous globe, whereby it is made a convenient habitation for the various tribes of animals which it sustains. The thin fluid that surrounds it is immediately necessary to the preservation of their lives, by breathing, as well as for the transmission of light, and nourishing warmth from the sun: Its solid parts support heavy living bodies; and it is every where so well supplied with water in perpetual courses, and by refreshing showers, as to answer sufficiently,
every

SERM. every where, the purpose of producing food

II. for them, and to furnish them with drink, besides other conveniencies of life. The several kinds have their proper elements assigned them, to which they are fitted by their make; and there is suitable provision made for them. The sea and the rivers are stored with scaly inhabitants, which pass thro' them with ease and pleasure having organs adapted to that purpose, and abundance of food convenient for them: But they cannot live on dry land; which, in its turn, is appropriated to other species: And they, by a quite different organization of their bodies, are fitted to move on it with equal ease; and have the means of their subsistence plentifully afforded them. None of these can mount up into the air; which yet is visited by several sorts of animals that wing their way thro' its regions, and by it easily ascend to the tops of mountains and tall trees, where they find both nourishment and shelter. Now is it not a just and obvious reflection on all this,—That God has diffused his bounty every where, and that all his works which come under our observation, are filled with the fruits of it. Neither earth, nor air, nor sea, are empty of living inhabitants, which he provides for. No place is without many witnesses of his liberality; and life is the care
of

of his providence. What human heart can SERM.
 be so insensible, as not to join with the pious II.
 psalmist in celebrating the praise of the di-
 vine wisdom and goodness? *The earth is full*
of thy riches, O Lord, so is the great and wide
sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable,
both small and great beasts. These wait all
upon thee, that thou mayst give them their
meat in due season. That thou givest them
they gather; thou openest thy hand, they are
filled with good.*

In the next place, as the animal life considered by itself, (especially its principal appearances, sensation and spontaneous motion,) has been proved to be a convincing evidence of the being of God, or of an intelligent agent who made the world; so it carries in it a very strong argument of his goodness. It is indeed the lowest immediate object of his goodness that we know, because its perceptions and enjoyments are of the lowest kind: But the benevolent disposition will always incline any agent to give pleasure rather than pain; and it is a plain instance of the Creator's benignity, that he has made even this low life with a capacity of some happiness, and provided for it all the happiness it is capable of. The animal constitution is such, that in every species

* Psal. civ. 25, 27, 28.

SERM. species of it we may observe a curious texture

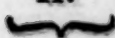
II. of the interior vital parts guarded by a strong outside; whereby it is preserved from those things which might be hurtful to its tender frame, and enabled to perform its proper functions without pain. The organs of sense are so situated as to convey the necessary notices for the safety and benefit of the whole body; and its instincts are all plainly fitted to its condition, determining it to that which is useful for its preservation, and to such enjoyment as is suitable to it. But these self-motions, sensations, and the following of instincts, are accompanied with a kind of gratification, so that the sensitive life itself is not dragged on with sorrow, nor is altogether joyless and insipid; but in its measure, partakes the bounty of kind provident nature. Of this, many species of the brutes give plain enough discoveries. With what ease and natural indications of delight, do the herds graze in their pastures? They sport in their manner, and play, satisfied with their portion, and as enjoying all that nature craves. The birds sing their chearful notes, and mount upwards with their signs of joy, as contented with what liberal nature has bountifully dispensed to them.

But

But of animal enjoyment we have a more SERM.
direct and immediate knowledge by what II.
we feel in ourselves: Having senses and appe-
tites very much resembling those of the infe-
rior kinds, we cannot but know what a va-
riety of gratification arises from them; and
thereby are led to acknowledge a large mani-
festation of the divine liberality, diffused thro'
the whole extent of sensitive nature.

Another observation concerning all sorts of
animals that we know is obvious to every
one; namely, that their affections do not
wholly terminate in themselves. Besides the
instincts which relate only to every individual,
whereby it is determined to seek its private
good, such as food, sleep, and other neces-
sary refreshment, they have strong attachments
to their kinds, and inclinations prompting
them to be useful to one another. Some live
in a sort of regular society, resembling a hu-
man common-wealth; especially the feebler
kinds, which have the greatest need of mutual
aid. The savage beasts, however destructive
they may be to other species, are, in their rough
manner, affectionate to their own: And the
tamer beasts flock together when any danger
threatens them; and the strong do not save
themselves by flight, but run hazards, and will
engage in painful struggles for the defence
of

SERM. of the weak. What labour and difficulty,

II.  nay extreme sufferings, will the dam undergo for her young, regardless of ease and life itself? So strong is natural affection in her! There seems indeed, farther, to be an established general relation between the species themselves, and a bond of union to run thro' the whole animal Kingdom; so that the interests of the several tribes do not in the main interfere, but rather, they are mutually useful to each other; especially as there is a visible subordination, the lower kinds are evidently serviceable to the superior, and seem to be made for their use. Above all, the very highest of the brutal species, are either willingly, or by a superiority of power and understanding, made unwillingly subject to mankind. Such an œconomy in the whole, tending to the common good, and to render all the individuals, and all the kinds, as publickly useful as they can be, shows a benevolent intention in the wise super-intending disposer.

This observation is founded on the general state and order of animals which fully justifies it. Some particular exceptions there may be: Not only individuals, which have somewhat unnatural in their dispositions whereby they are pernicious to others of their kind; but whole species which do not to us appear
to

to be useful in the earth ; on the contrary, SERM.
they are destructive to the best of the brutes, II.

and are enemies to men. But these are rare instances, and the effects of them do not reach so far as to be dangerous to any species of living creatures. The strength of the argument lies in this ; That good is evidently prevalent in the constitution of nature ; and not only the individuals, but the kinds of animals, are under a general law of sympathy, whereby they are useful, rather than hurtful to each other ; conspiring together, as parts of one whole, to promote the common safety and happiness ; which plainly shews a beneficent design in the author of the system. If some few examples can be alledged which have a contrary appearance, That ought not to be urged as an objection against what is *so evidently* the general, and effectually prevailing intention of nature : Rather it becomes us to acknowledge our own ignorance, than rashly to censure the works of providence which we cannot comprehend. It is certain, That may have the appearance of ill, upon a slight and imperfect view, which in the whole may be good : And those parts of the creation, particularly some animals, which seem to our short and narrow understanding useless, nay hurtful, may yet answer some important
and

SERM. and beneficial purposes in the intire œconomy
 II. of nature, tho' we do not at present perceive
 it.

Again, as thus there appears upon the face of the animal Kingdom a regular œconomy, and an union of interests and affections, whereby good is predominant in the whole, manifesting good in the design and contrivance of the author and ruler; so there is a very remarkable *variety* which discovers the wisdom of God. For a diversity of regular productions shews the understanding as well as the liberty of an agent. But this, instead of being any diminution of his goodness, shews it in a stronger and clearer light. For it shews, that the benevolent principle is not confined to one method of manifestation, but that the exercise of it is suited to every exigency of all the objects which are capable of it. The unexhausted fountain flows in various streams, satisfying every living thing with that which is convenient for it. Besides, no one kind could so replenish the earth with inhabitants, the monuments of the creator's bounty, as now it is replenished; nor could an equal multitude of one kind be so well furnished with the necessities of life by its productions, as the different kinds are. Men would increase no farther than they do, if there were no brutes;
 nor

nor would they be better accommodated: ON SERM.
the contrary, they would want many advantages for the comfortable enjoyment of life, II.

which they now possess. One of the brutal species does not hinder the increase, or the subsistence of another; but there is a liberal, and for the most part, a different provision made for every one of them. So that the multifarious appearance of the sensible life is only a more extensive object for the divine munificence to display itself upon. Animals indeed, have different kinds and degrees of perfection and enjoyment. Some have powers and faculties which others want. Some are fitted for quick motion; others are made for strength. Some are endued with a greater sagacity than others; and man excels them all in intellectual powers. But it does not follow that God is not good to all, because he has not made them all equal. Goodness is a principle which does not exert itself to the utmost of the agent's power, in every single effect he produces. When conducted by wisdom, its exercise is accommodated to the condition of the objects; or if the whole of their existence and state depends upon it, (which is the case of all creatures with respect to God,) it manifests itself in the variety of its gifts. But whatever distinction there may be, and

SERM. however some may be dignified and made

II. happy above others, there is no pretence for a complaint against the goodness of the creator, from the condition he appoints to any creature, when good is prevalent in it, and it is better than non-existence.

The duration of the animal life is fixed by the meer pleasure of its author, as well as the degrees of its perfection while it does continue. And it may be longer or shorter, just as he thinks fit, without any reproach on his beneficence. If upon the whole, its existence is preferable to the contrary, as having in it more pleasure than pain, (besides its being part of a good system, and useful to superior life,) the shortness of its continuance can no more reasonably be objected against the creator's goodness, than the imperfection of its frame and state when compared with creatures of a higher rank. Is not God to be acknowledged good to his living creatures on the earth, if he communicates to them all the happiness they are capable of, though he does not perpetuate their being? And is not a measure of enjoyment distributed among a multitude of short-lived beings as great a manifestation of benevolence, as the same measure of enjoyment continued longer in the possession of a few. I observe this to shew that the preservation

ervation of the animal species in a succession S E R M.
of individuals, (which is the established law II.

of their nature,) is no ground of objection against the goodness of God to them; since if by that method the exercise of it to *some* is shortned in duration, the objects of it are multiplied, and it is exercised towards a greater number. Nor is it any imputation on a regular good œconomy, that some individuals of the different kinds, in their several successions, devour others. For what disadvantage is it to a short-lived animal, or how is it inconsistent with the goodness of providence, that after it has enjoyed the happiness that is suitable to its condition, it falls at last a sacrifice to a superior nature, and so serves the good of the whole? Thus it plainly appears, that the care of divine providence extends to the earth and all its inhabitants. It is made a convenient place of abode for living creatures, and is plentifully stocked with them. If one considers the number of them, it is amazing how they should be provided for, yet not one of them is *forgotten before God*. They all live plentifully, on the alms of his bounty. *Their eyes wait upon him, and he gives them their meat in due season; he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.* These are, indeed, the lowest objects of his

SERM. beneficence, but since they are not neglected,
 II. much more may we be assured, that beings of
 a superior order and dignity partake of his
 goodness, in a way suitable to their nature.

Let us proceed to higher instances of the divine benevolence ; and of which we ourselves are directly and immediately the conscious witnesses. Man is the principal inhabitant of this lower world ; and in every light in which we view him, he will appear to be the monument of his Creator's bounty. If we consider the life which he has in common with other animals, it is cared for and enriched like theirs, by the liberality of providence. It is adorned with a variety of senses and appetites, which afford various entertainment, being all provided with objects suitable to them. He has food convenient for him, and all his frequently returning wants plentifully supplied. But the human nature is distinguished, even in this lower part of it, from all other sensitive beings, by many and great advantages in its constitution. The exterior form itself has a visible pre-eminence above the brutal shapes, by the delicacy of its composition, its erect posture, a beautiful countenance, and organs fitted for a vastly wider compass of perception, and a vastly greater variety of action. The tokens of man's supremacy
 upon

upon earth are so visible, that the greatest part of the other kinds, some of them far superior in bodily strength, seem to be sensible of it. They acknowledge him their Lord, and in their way pay him homage, with little difficulty being brought to spend their lives in his service. Especially, that *Reason* which is our chief prerogative, and considered by itself is a fund of noble enjoyment, (therefore a separate clear demonstration of the goodness of God,) Reason, I say, as it is joined to the lower part of our constitution, does greatly embellish and enoble it. The brutes go on in one perpetual track by the direction of their instincts. Between eating, drinking, a few other animal functions, and rest, their time is consumed, till the perishable machine, made only for a short duration, fails from inward disorders, or yields to external violence. But man, by his superior understanding, is taught to enjoy life at a higher rate; it is diversified with much more pleasure, and takes in a great number of entertaining objects.

It is true, the brutes seem to have some advantages above us. They quickly arrive at maturity, and are enabled to shift for themselves. Nature has provided them with the means of subsistence, without any forethought; and with instruments of defence

S E R M. against foreign injuries, which they have skill

II. to use without any instructor. The hardy frame of their bodies make them easy, uncovered, in the open air; and the bare earth is a pleasant resting-place for them. Whereas man, a helpless creature in infancy, long nourished by the tender care of others, even when grown to his full vigour, and the perfect use of all his faculties, cannot enjoy life in any tolerable manner without a great expence of thought and labour. His feeble constitution needs a great deal of art to preserve it. Great pains must be bestowed on preparing a mansion for him; much industry used for his clothing; and forecast, with diligence as well as frugal management, in providing, and keeping for him constant supplies of food. But all these inconveniencies are abundantly compensated by other privileges of his nature; especially, the inward powers and affections, wherewith he is endued, which enable and direct him to improve life, and exalt the enjoyment of it to a high degree of perfection, beyond what any other animal ever did, or can attain to. *The inspiration of the Almighty, which has given us understanding and taught us more than the beasts of the field, qualifies us for contriving means in order to render our condition easy and comfortable, far beyond what*

what their instincts prompt them to. But SERM.
when to this is added the social affections II.
planted in every human heart, disposing man-
kind for the supply of their common neces-
sities to join counsels together, and to be mu-
tually assisting to each other, (which they can
the more easily do because of the excellent
faculty they have of communicating their
thoughts by speech,) and to form themselves
into regular societies, for preserving order and
encouraging arts and industry; —All these ad-
vantages taken together cast the ballance so
sensibly on our side, that not only they *may*
render, but actually have rendered human life
abundantly more noble and elegant. We look
down upon the brutal as low and mean, nay
as void of happiness in comparison.

But this is not the chief pre-eminence of man above the beasts. If we consider the superior part of his constitution abstractly, and without regard to the influence it has on the animal life, exalting and adoring it,--in this view, he will appear a yet more peculiar and illustrious monument of his Creator's goodness. Every one who attends to the powers of reflection and reasoning, must be conscious of a sublime excellence in them. As a great variety of ideas arise in our minds from external objects, the faculty of comparing

E 4. them,

SERM. them, of examining their relations, their

II. agreement and disagreement, and thereupon
 forming a judgment concerning them,—This
 faculty, I say, which we perceive in ourselves,
 is accompanied with a sense of such dignity
 and perfection, that we cannot but value it as
 a high prerogative of our nature, and look
 upon the beings which are void of it, as far
 inferior to us. Not only so, the intellectual
 capacity, carefully improved, affords a high
 enjoyment, which upon comparison appears
 vastly superior to the pleasures of the senses.
 It is not limited, as they are, to singular ex-
 isting objects, and their presence : The mind
 by its reflecting power reviving the images of
 things which it once perceived, (besides an im-
 mense fund which arises from reflection or
 attention to its own powers and operations,)
 can entertain itself agreeably, in the absence of
 outward objects, with their images which it
 retains ; can inquire into their properties, and
 investigate truths concerning them ; which are
 agreeable objects to its perception, even tho'
 they be mere speculations, not applied to any
 practical purpose. But if they be so applied,
 and are found useful in life, which sometimes
 is the case, the enjoyment is thereby greatly
 increased. This is a gratification we have al-
 ways at hand ; and the frequent repetition of
 it

it does not pall the desire, but whets it rather ; SERM.
II.
it does not occasion satiety and disgust, nor
is reviewed with remorse, as sensual pleasures

often are ; but the mind dwells upon it with delight, and has satisfaction in it, as an exercise and entertainment worthy of itself. Such an application and improvement of the intellectual capacity, gives a high relish to our existence, a consciousness of vast superiority to, nay, by it we seem to enjoy a kind of wide command over, the material world ; subjecting the whole of it to examination ; separating its nearest parts ; uniting its most distant extremes ; viewing it on all sides ; and so possessing in some sort, whatever is entertaining in it. But by the exercise of this power, we rise in the objects of our knowledge above corporeal nature. We have the ideas of thought, of consciousness, of liberty, of volition, and of moral objects, which have no manner of affinity with extended solid substance, or any of its modes. Thus we are introduced into another world, vastly more delightful than the visible ; in the mental survey of which, we may entertain ourselves with high satisfaction. We see an excellent spiritual œconomy in our own constitution ; a subordination of powers, and a ballance of affections ; we imagine, not without a great probability of truth,

SERM. truth, superior orders of intelligent beings ;

II. and we are convinced by strong arguments, of uncreated original excellence at the head of all, possessed of the highest absolute perfections, the noblest of all objects, in the contemplation of which the mind rests, with the utmost complacency. This part of the human frame carries the plain marks of its author's benevolence. What but supreme goodness could be the motive to a production, so formed, as by its proper and natural operation to yield such noble enjoyment ?

But I will not pretend to examine the parts of our inward constitution minutely. Every power of our nature, and every affection, when duly exercised, is naturally attended with enjoyment ; and the harmony of the whole yields a high degree of complicated felicity, which clearly shews that the gracious father of our spirits designed them for happiness. Let us consider that, which is certainly the source of the most intense, sincere, and lasting pleasures, the sense of moral goodness, and the practice of it. That the human mind is made with a knowledge of right and wrong, or of moral good and evil, with their eternal necessary difference, I have endeavoured elsewhere to show, and shall not now repeat it. And that this part
of

of the constitution, (the judgment of recti-
tude, and the approbation of it with the dis-
position of our minds towards it,) is good, or
that it tends to happiness, and must have been
designed by the author of nature, must ap-
pear to every considerate person. For, first,
let us set before our selves the idea of virtue
in the most abstract way we can think of it ;
(it is not difficult for any man to form in his
own imagination a good moral character, made
up of purity, justice, gratitude, sincerity, and
universal benevolence,) nothing appears more
amiable to the mind. As from a regularity
in the situation of external objects, and a due
mixture of sensible qualities or the contrary,
there arises an idea of beauty and deformity ;
so from good and bad dispositions and actions
of moral agents, the ideas of moral beauty
and turpitude strike the interior sense of the
soul, raising in it the highest approbation or
dislike ; so that rectitude, considered only as
an object of speculation, yields great pleasure
to the mind, and is the loveliest form which
can be presented to it. If the external senses
which serve the low ends of animal life, and
give it pleasure by conveying the images of
material objects, are to be attributed to the
goodness of the creator ; much more that
more excellent sense which serves nobler pur-
poses,

SERM.
II.

S E R M. poses, and is attended with higher delight, is

II. a glorious proof of the pleasure he takes in communicating happiness. But morality is intended by the author of the human constitution, not merely as a subject of agreeable meditation; our tempers are to be formed, and our practice regulated by it. There is therefore a high esteem, a strong affection, and an ardent desire to it, excited in the heart of every man who attends to it calmly and deliberately. He cannot think of a state of virtue, otherwise than as the happiest and best that it is possible for him or any rational being to be in: That it is most becoming the rational nature: And an intelligent creature altogether destitute of it, (if there be any such,) is an object of the utmost horror and aversion; That it is most praise-worthy to prefer moral integrity to the gratification of all animal desires, and selfish passions; nay, to despise them, in comparison; and the mind can never be thoroughly easy and satisfied in itself, without resolving to sacrifice every thing in this world to virtue, and to bear the utmost extremity of pain, rather than betray its cause, and depart from its rules.

This shews of what importance morality is in our constitution; and experience will convince us, that the most serene, solid, and
lasting

lasting joys, perpetually spring from the practice of it. If a man can reflect on good actions done by him from hearty affection and truly virtuous motives, let him judge whether any other satisfaction is equal to that which such reflection yields. It is a pleasure for which he is not indebted to any thing without: It does not depend on variable accidents as sensual gratifications do, which must be supported by foreign objects, and are liable to the changes of their condition and circumstances; besides, the inconstancy of the appetite itself makes animal enjoyment subject to many interruptions, and the transient pleasure is succeeded with pain, still in proportion to the degree of its vehemence. But *the good man is satisfied from himself*: He possesses an inward tranquillity independent on external events. The vigorous exercise of his own virtuous affections, is accompanied with high delight; the good he communicates to others is reflected back upon himself, and greatly increases his pleasure; he reviews the temper of his mind, and his actions with self-approbation. This is a perpetual spring of undecaying joy, which suffers no abatement by length of time, or change of circumstances. When the mind reflects upon it, it is always fresh; never exhausted, but by repetition strengthened, rather than diminished.

SERM. nished. No outward calamity or reverse of
 II. fortune ; not the indisposition of the body, or the approach of death, which quite extinguish all animal enjoyments, can take away the relish of these moral pleasures, which seem to be inseparable from the mind that is qualified for them, in every state of its existence. Must not the virtuous Soul retiring into itself, calmly and attentively surveying those its own powers and operations, (a perpetual inward spring of pleasure !) rejoice in its own being, and tracing them back to the true original, the free and kind intention of the designing cause, must it not acknowledge him infinitely good ?

It is farther to be remembered, that the tendency of virtue is not merely to the good of every individual, it diffuses its beneficial influence over the whole human species, and promotes their common happiness. This is so evident that I need not insist upon it. Every attentive person must be convinced, that piety, justice, temperance, and charity, universally practised, would render the condition of men in this world as happy as it could possibly be : That the greatest part of the misery which we see and feel, proceeds from the contrary vices ; from luxury, injustice, covetousness, wrath, and pride, which
 only

only make men enemies and hurtful to one another; and that whatever measure of safety and comfort in this life subsists among men, is principally owing to the measure which there is in them of the good and benevolent, or the virtuous affections. And now upon reviewing this part of our constitution, must we not pronounce it very good? Must it not be acknowledged, that the author of it is a kind and benevolent being, and that human nature was made for happiness? Since the principles which lead to it are so deeply wrought into our frame, we pursue it effectually, by following the dictates of our minds, and cannot fail of attaining it, without doing violence to ourselves. If we should suppose a species of creatures constituted after a quite different manner; every individual uneasy to itself, having a quick sense of pain which should arise from a multitude of occasions the most common in life, and should attend the proper exercise of its powers, and render all the functions of nature whereby life is preserved, at least joyless and insipid; at the same time with malevolent dispositions towards its fellows, having no pleasure in social communication with them, but a natural bent towards their misery and destruction; how unhappy must such a state be? And what

SERM.
II.

SERM. a frightful idea must we have of the contri-

II.  ver? And yet nothing but the goodness of the creator could hinder its being actually the condition of created beings; since the whole of their constitution, and every circumstance in it, depends intirely on his pleasure. But when we find our selves in such a state, that not only we are capable of much enjoyment but prevented with instincts which naturally determine us to it; and not only furnished with selfish affections, which terminate in private good, making every one easy to himself, but with publick affections, whereby we are directed to pursue the common happiness of the kind, as inseparable from that of individuals, all conspiring to produce the greatest moment of good which could be produced;—when, I say, we find it so, it would be the utmost ingratitude not to acknowledge the beneficence of the author of our being.

It must be confessed, and every one finds it by experience, that there is in the human frame a sense of pain as well as pleasure, and equally to be attributed to the author of nature as its cause. They are both bodily and mental uneasinesses, set against enjoyments of each kind: From which it clearly follows indeed, that our present state is imperfect. But if we examine this appearance thoroughly, and consider

sider the plain tendency and design of these S E R M.
opposite sensations, it is a direct proof of the II.

than any just objection against it. For pleasure is the natural result of life, and of every one of its powers in their due operation. Pain arises only from such things as are hurtful to it; determining us to avoid them, or apply proper remedies. The uneasy sensations produced by external objects, and the distempered condition of the body, excite us to necessary care, and the use of means for our safety, much more effectually than our imperfect knowledge of things, and calm reason would do without them: And that inward remorse which accompanies evil actions, is the most powerful dissuasive from the repeated commission of them, and consequently to imperfect moral agents, (whose infirmity makes such a motive necessary,) it is a very strong one to the practice of virtue, which is their greatest happiness. And thus, I think, it plainly appears, that the constitution of the human nature, imperfect as it is, and not without a mixture of unhappiness, (probably holding the lowest rank in the rational and moral part of the creation,) yet carries in it the clearest marks of the creator's bounty, and is a production of his power and wisdom, which at the same

SERM. time fully proves him to be a benevolent, and
 II. a gracious Being.

There is yet another view of the human nature and condition, applicable to all its capacities and all its enjoyments, in which we may discern the plainest marks of goodness on the part of its designing author and ruler. What I mean is (and no one can miss of observing it) that we grow up by degrees to the proper use of all our powers, and to the business and enjoyment of life, in the whole compass of it. Man at the commencement of his being, is a very weak unfinished creature; intended, but no way qualified, for important employments and a considerable figure in the world; unfurnished with knowledge and abilities of every sort for the province assigned him: And if experience did not convince us, one would not imagine that a new born infant could ever arrive at that measure of understanding, and that useful and delightful activity, in various ways, which we see grown men have actually attained to. But as the body with all its members, in due proportion, encreases to a fitness for the part appointed to it, so the faculties of the mind are enlarged gradually; the understanding advances by slow steps to its maturity; and by it the objects are introduced, which excite our affections

affections and occasion the exertion of our S E R M.
active powers, which become more vigorous II.

by their exercise, acquiring habits attended with facility, promptness, and pleasure in acting. Our first essays, both in thinking and action, are so feeble and imperfect, as scarcely to discover the very being of the internal rational and active principles; and from so low beginnings, it is wonderful such progress should be made as we find in fact there is. But the progress is by imperceptible degrees, and every step of it really, though not sensibly, strengthens the faculty, and prepares it for farther improvements. And as the various powers of the human mind, the understanding, the memory, and the affections, jointly exert themselves in the finished scheme of life, they are during their progress mutually helpful to each other in preparation for it. When we arrive to a capacity of reflecting on the frame of our nature and its powers, with their ends and uses, we are then charged with the care of ourselves; so to cultivate our faculties and affections and to regulate their exercise, that the purposes of them may be obtained, and we may possess that happiness, which by a due culture they are naturally fitted to produce. And as thus it is evident, that in this important work a great

SERM. deal depends on our prudence, diligence, and resolution; so our experience in the progress of life will convince us of the necessity, and furnish us with the occasions, of controuling our appetites and passions, (which is the most necessary part of self-discipline,) to qualify a man for behaving suitably to his condition, and enjoying all the advantages of it.

I have said that this is applicable to every capacity of the human nature, and every state of its existence. Consider man as a rational and social creature in this world; and in this view the various steps of his progress from infancy to manhood, (together with the changes of condition suitable to them,) prepare him gradually for the part he is to act here, and for the enjoyment which is appointed for him. Suppose a man brought into the world in a mature state, having all his faculties in as great perfection as ever they attain to; yet being wholly uninstructed in the affairs of life, and unpractised in its arts, utterly deficient in all that skill and self-government, which are acquired by habits, he must be very much at a loss how to conduct himself; even how to use with decency, and in due proportion, the organs of his body, and the powers of his mind; how to provide for his own subsistence; how to govern his natural propensions of all kinds;

kinds; and under what restrictions to gratify them, and how to behave in society. And

SERM.
II.

as this was actually the case of the first man, we must suppose that the gracious author of his being was his immediate instructor in the whole art of living; otherwise human life, (if it could have subsisted at all,) must have been at least for a long time, a rude, uncultivated, unharmonious, and uncomfortable thing. But now that a course of nature is established, That extraordinary method of instruction has ceased; and the want of it is supplied by the education we have, in our leisurely passage through the various periods of childhood and youth to complete manhood, (still under the tuition of kind providence,) whereby we are fitted for the offices, and enjoyments of a mature state. Thus it is also in the highest capacities of our nature, the intellectual and moral, considered abstractly from the use of them in the temporal life. The human mind is capable of great improvements in knowledge and virtue: But in the beginning of its existence, there are no appearances of either; no discoveries by their exercise, of rational and moral powers. While our sensitive faculties advance slowly to their appointed measure of perfection, the interior nobler powers which distinguish our species from other animals,

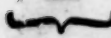
SERM. begin to appear very weak and imperfect. By

II. degrees however, the mind is opened to those sentiments; and its affections and active powers, by a vigorous attention and repeated acts, are formed into that character, and ripened into those confirmed habits, in which our true perfection and happiness consists. And for this the discipline of our present probationary state, where instruction is mixed with trial, is a good preparation.

Like this probably, in some measure, is the state of all finite free agents, in the beginning of their existence. There are deficiencies in knowledge and moral perfection, whereby there is naturally a possibility, and even a danger, of their falling into error and deviating from rectitude. Their escape from this danger, (which the good author of their being has put into the power of every such creature,) must be by the proper exercise of their own powers; by a careful attention, a resolute adherence to their duty, and the steady practice of virtue, which confirms good affections, and raises them to a security against temptations. But whatever the condition of superior natures may be, and however ignorant we are of the reasons which make it necessary that it should be thus progressive, we know that in fact this is the state of man; and we
may

may with delightful gratitude observe in it the wisely conducted benignity of our Creator. What could be more worthy of perfect wisdom and goodness, than that such rational creatures, (probably the lowest order of them,) should not be brought into their largest sphere of action, till they were fitted for it by a preparatory discipline; nor raised to the highest happiness, till by the gradual enlargement of their faculties they should be qualified to enjoy it in the best manner? That they should be trained up by degrees to a meetness for their noblest employment, and principal felicity, which their full-grown faculties are by no means adapted to, without such an education? That every step of their progress should encrease their capacity; enable them more and more to contribute to their own perfection; the consciousness whereof is, and in such creatures, must be, a chief ingredient in their happiness? Thus God, agreeably to the ordinary methods of his operation in the course of nature, carries on this work of his, the noblest in this lower world, by a continued series of well-chosen means; and brings man by slow successive steps, to his finished form, a monument of his own goodness. And as we find it so in every capacity of our being, so we have reason to believe it will

SERM. be thro' the whole of our existence. For

II.  since our highest powers are capable of improvements to which we cannot fix any limits, yet still infinitely distant from absolute perfection; every addition to our intellectual and moral attainments is a fresh manifestation of the divine unexhausted bounty; will increase our rational happiness, and furnish new matter of praise to its original author. And,

Lastly, (Still confining our inquiries concerning this subject to the points which we have the best means and opportunities of understanding,) let us consider men as in their present existence, under the care of divine providence, and the general tenor of its dispensations towards them, and we shall find, that goodness and mercy follows them thro' the whole course of their lives. Man is not sent into the world to shift for himself, and to improve the powers of his nature, and the advantages of his condition, in the best manner he can for his own happiness, without the interposition of a superior power in his behalf. As God continually superintends the whole course of nature, by his own immediate agency, governing the affairs of the universe, the intire series of events in it, and all its various appearances; he particularly preserves, and

con-

constantly watches over all the nations of SERM.
 men, *whom he has made of one blood, to dwell* II.
upon the face of the whole earth, with a tender

compassionate care. His goodness, manifested in providing daily supplies for the numberless wants of the animal life, has been already observed: And not only does man partake of this in common with other living creatures, but it may be said to be, in some sense, peculiar to him; he being the principal, and all the other species by the appointment of providence, serving him with their labours, and their lives, as made for his sake.

Must it not appear to the conviction of any attentive mind, that in all the generations of men which have been since the world began, God never left himself without a witness of his bounty, *in that he gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons,* whereby not only themselves were fed with the vegetable productions of the earth, but a multitude of animals, all in subjection and ministering to them in a variety of ways. As the devout psalmist observes, man has been cared for by his indulgent father, like a king in this low world. *Thou Lord, says he, hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and dignity. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands;*

SERM. *hands; thou hast put all things under his feet;*
 II. *all sheep, and oxen, yea and the beasts of the*
fields, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the
sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths
of the sea.

The argument has still a greater force, if we consider the moral state of mankind. Instead of approving themselves to God by a proper use of their rational faculties in pursuing the true ends of their being, they are greatly degenerated, all flesh have corrupted their ways, fallen short of the glory of God, and by a multitude of transgressions rendered themselves obnoxious to his displeasure. This consideration sets his goodness towards them in the most amiable light, heightening it into tender pity and long-suffering patience. Nothing is more apparently essential to the character of the supreme governor of the world, than perfect holiness; he loves righteousness and hates iniquity. As every man's own conscience approving the righteous laws of his nature, is a witness to the moral rectitude of the great Lawgiver, and leads him to the expectation of his just judgment, or impartial distribution of rewards and punishments; so the remarkable interposal of divine providence in the affairs of the world, by inflicting severe judgments for the heinous wickedness

ness

ness of men obstinately persisted in, has been universally acknowledg'd; and desolating strokes, such especially as were sudden and surprising, not expected according to the ordinary course of nature, (as *when the foundation of the wicked*, nay, the whole world of the ungodly was overthrown with a preternatural flood; *Sodom* and *Gomorrab* were destroy'd by a fire from heaven;) such strokes have been always attributed to the immediate avenging hand of God, as a signification to men, even in their state of trial, of his general design at last finally to condemn impenitent sinners, when the righteous shall be saved; of which great distinguishing judgment, there were eminent examples set forth in the deliverance of *Noah* from the flood, and of *Lot* from the destruction of *Sodom*. These signal surprising desolations, I say, have been universally attributed to the immediate hand of God: The other catastrophes of nations and cities which had not such miraculous appearances, have been accounted for by the wisest of men in the same manner, when (which upon a careful Observation will appear to have been generally the case in fact) they followed a long course of obstinate and irreclaimable iniquity. But these interpositions are extraordinary, and evidently intended

SERM.

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S E R M. tended as examples for the reformation of sin-

II. *ners, and that by the judgments of God which are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof may learn righteousness; which is their greatest good, and the only sure foundation of their happiness. The general administration of providence is different. The gentle methods of mercy and loving kindness are always first used to lead men to repentance. They never have reason to complain, that they are surprised with destroying vengeance, in the beginning of their departure from the paths of virtue; or indeed that it overtakes them, till after many repeated provocations, and till by their incorrigible perverseness and the impenitency of their hearts they have treasured wrath to themselves. The Instances recorded in scripture which I have referred to, of God's righteous severity against heinous offenders, do also afford us remarkable examples of his patience. When God had resolved to destroy the world with a flood, yet * St. Peter observes, that his long-suffering waited while the ark was preparing, during which time Noab was a preacher of righteousness to them, to try if they could possibly be reclaimed, and that ruin prevented. And before the overthrow of Sodom, just Lot was sent to be a teacher and an example of virtue*

* 1 Pet. iii. 20.

true there, *whose righteous soul was long vexed with their unlawful deeds*; while God continued such a warning to them, unwilling that they should perish; and at last represented himself as ready to spare the city, if there were found in it but ten righteous persons. Towards the generality of mankind, and in the ordinary course of things, lenity is so apparently the character of the divine government, the instances of its severity so very rare, and punishment so long delayed, that this is often abused by sinners to the encouraging and hardening themselves in their wicked courses; *and because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil* *.

And now to conclude, If upon the whole it appears by the best judgment we can make of the works of God which are known to us; by the frame of inanimate nature, and the constant providential direction of its course, as related to living creatures; by the animal constitution fitted for various kinds of enjoyment, and liberally supplied with the means of it; especially the constitution of the human nature, indued with noble powers and affections, in the proper exercise of which it is capable of attaining to a high degree of perfection and felicity; and by the conduct of
divine

* Ecclef. viii. 11.

SERM. divine providence towards mankind, continually heaping favours upon them notwithstanding their sins, and exercising all the forbearance and indulgence to them which can consist with a regard to righteousness and virtue, (the promoting whereof thro' the whole creation in his uniform design, most worthy of perfect goodness;) if, I say, it appears by the best judgment we can make upon a survey of these the works and ways of God, all of them which fall under our observation, that the universal tendency is to happiness, and therefore the universal intention seeing the cause is perfectly wise; various happiness, according to the various capacities of the beings it is designed for;—must we not conclude, that he is a kind and benevolent being, *that the Lord is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

S E R M O N III.

The principal Objections against the
Goodness of God answered.

Mark x. 18.

There is none good but one, that is God.

AS there is no principle of greater ne-
cessity and importance in religion than
the goodness of God, (indeed without
it religion cannot subsist,) there is none of
which we have more clear and satisfying
evidence. Universal nature proclaims it; and
wherever eternal Power and God-head are
manifested, there also goodness is seen, *being
understood by the things that are made.* The
inanimate part of the creation, itself unca-
pable of any enjoyment, is so framed and go-
vern'd as to have a visible relation to life, and
to be subservient to its preservation and hap-
piness. The animals of the earth are conti-
nually cared for by bountiful providence; and
especially man, considered in the whole com-
pass

S E R M.
III.

SERM. pass of his being, is a monument of his creator's beneficence.

III.

But there is an objection against this doctrine taken from the *evil* which there is in the world. This very world which is represented as such a theatre of the divine goodness, and particularly the state of mankind, seems on the contrary to contain so much evil of various kinds, that some have been extremely shocked by it. If the supreme ruler, whose power is irresistible and his knowledge unlimited, be perfectly good, and he designed the happiness of his creatures,—How shall the many calamities which men feel themselves perpetually subjected to, and deeply affected with, be accounted for? Whence comes sickness and pains, poverty and distress, famine and pestilence, wars and desolations? And if these miseries are alledged to be the natural or penal consequences of moral evil, how shall the permission of that moral evil be explained?

This difficulty has appeared so great, as to give occasion to a scheme of principles directly opposite to those which we have endeavoured to establish, I mean that which is commonly called the *Manichean* system, (first, 'tis probable, vented among the *Persian Magi*, afterwards embraced by some professed Christians,) concerning two *independent* principles in the universe,

universe, the one good the father of lights, SERM.
from whom good of every kind is derived as III.

from its proper author and cause; the other an eternal, necessary, and self-originated principle of evil, to whom, as its true cause, must be attributed all the evil, both natural and moral, which is in the world. It may be observed, that this opinion absurd as it is, professes a respect to the article we are now considering, the goodness of God, being not avowedly levelled against it; the evidence of it is, it seems, so glaring, that none of mankind who acknowledge a deity pretend to deny it; but is levelled against his omnipotence, his independence, and absolute supremacy. But as the proof of these perfections and glories of the supreme being is too strong to be shaken by any pretence whatsoever, so the *Manichean* error, whatever it pretends, really subverts the doctrine of God's goodness itself so far as it is the foundation of religion; and defeats the most essential pious affections which arise from it, by destroying confidence in God, from whose dominion, according to that scheme, evil is exempted, and we can have no hope of escaping it by his insufficient power; and it corrupts the true notion of moral evil, leading us to understand it, not as the voluntary, and therefore culpable act of

SERM. a free agent, but as derived from an independent necessity of nature.

III.

The principle of two *co-ordinate* and *independent* powers the causes of all things, or of two *Deities*, is unsupported by any pretence of proof; a meerly arbitrary hypothesis, invented to salve the appearance of evil, of which however it gives no satisfying account. I have endeavoured on another occasion to prove the unity of God, by shewing *unity of design* in the frame and course of nature, or in the constitution and government of the inanimate, the sensitive, the intellectual, and moral world; and all the arguments insisted on for that purpose conclude still more strongly when applied to the present subject; that is, they demonstrate that there are not, nor can possibly be, two intelligent beings absolutely supreme and unmade, the makers and rulers of the world, of directly opposite characters, the one perfectly good, from whom all happiness and every thing truly worthy and valuable proceeds; the other malicious, always intending, and always producing all the misery and wickedness he can. Must it not appear to any plain understanding extremely absurd, that there should be a constant harmony in the effects when there is not only a diversity, but a stated irreconcilable contrariety in the counsels, the interests, and

and intire characters of the intelligent causes? S E R M.

That two agents, whose designs continually thwart each other, and their dispositions are as

III.

inconſiſtent as light and darkneſs, ſhould join together to form and carry on a vaſt ſyſtem which comprehends an almoſt infinite variety of parts, yet without any marks of diſagreement, but, on the contrary, the order of their works is preſerved, and the obvious ends of them uniformly purſued? That there ſhould be a malevolent, ſelf-originated, and independent being, active and intelligent, ever prone to miſchief, and exerting his utmoſt power in the production of it; and yet in the whole extent of nature, as far as we can diſcern, not one monument of his true character to be ſeen; not one finiſhed piece or ſyſtem which by its conſtitution and the law of its nature tends to, and ultimately terminates in miſery; but every living thing, capable of pleaſure and pain, that we know, is ſo framed, that its natural ſtate is a ſtate of ſuch happineſs as is ſuitable to its condition of being?

The truth is, when one looks attentively into the *Manichean* ſcheme, it appears ſo full of groſs abſurdities, ſo deſtitute of rational evidence, nay utterly inconſiſtent with the moſt obvious *Phænomena* of the world, as ſcarcely in the judgment of any reaſonable

SERM. man, to want a refutation. But the appearance, which gave rise to it, deserves to be seriously inquired into as an objection against the divine goodness. In this view therefore I shall consider it, in the present discourse; and if we can get fairly rid of the difficulty, and a rational account can be given of the origin of evil, without having recourse to two independent principles, the foundations of religion upon the foot of one sole supreme monarch of the universe, will be still more firmly established.

To begin with that part of the objection which relates to natural evil, or unhappiness, such as sickness, and pain, and death: Here we acknowledge all that can be demanded, namely, that not only this is permitted by the Deity, but that his providence is the cause of it as well as of other appearances in the world. He is intimately present with all his creatures, continually superintending all their affairs, exercising his power and wisdom in the preservation and government of them: He makes them to be what they are, guides their motions and tendencies, and by his own agency affects the alterations which are in their state. He is particularly the author of life; it is sustained by him, and all its enjoyments are derived from his bounty. *In him*

we live and move and have being. It would be unreasonable then, not to attribute to him the appointed changes in our condition, and to allege that he gives joy, but not grief, health, but not sickness, and that he is the author of life, but not of death; seeing events of one kind as naturally fall out in the usual course of things as the other, and if there be one government of the world, must be equally under its direction. The scripture, which so fully asserts the goodness of God, (representing it as an essential perfection of his nature, and manifested by his diffusing its beneficial fruits over the whole creation, and opening his hand liberally to satisfy every living thing,) yet at the same time declares very expressly, that natural evil is his creature as well as good, and that the sufferings of sensitive and intelligent beings proceed from him as truly as their happiness. Thus one of the prophets, in the name of God says, * *I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.* Another, † *Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* In the 104th Psalm, where the argument of the divine beneficence is designedly treated, and the plenitude of its manifestations in all parts of the terraqueous globe,

SERM.
III.
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yet

* Isaiah xlv. 7.

† Amos iii. 6.

SERM. yet it is said, * *he hides his face and living*
 III. *creatures are troubled; he takes away their*
 { *breath, and they die and return to their dust.*

And to add no more, *Moses* fully asserts the supreme dominion and power of almighty God as exercised in destroying life, and in wounding as well as healing,—† *See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me; I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.*

Now the question is, whether all this, (which we have acknowledged as certainly true in fact,) is inconsistent with the goodness of God? Here the proof seems fairly to lie on the objector; for positive evidence has been brought on the other side, which we think clear and convincing. If then an appearance is alleged to be inconsistent, it is most reasonably required that the inconsistency should be shewn. But this is never to be done, if we take into consideration all that is necessary in order to our making a true and certain judgment. Indeed if the point were to be determined by the first report of sense, we should be apt to pronounce every kind and degree of pain or uneasiness *evil*, and the designing author of it *unkind*. But experience

* Ver. 28.

† Deut. xxxii. 39.

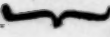
perience has taught all men that have common sense, to judge otherwise. For nothing is more obvious, even within the narrow compass of our own affairs in the present state, than that many things which at first seemed to be grievous, upon a more thorough consideration of the effects they produce, and their remote consequences, are found to be salutary, and those which have the flattering appearance of pleasant or good, prove in the issue destructive: Some things, for instance, which are very pernicious to life, and on that account must rather be judged evil; as on the other hand very unpleasant medicines, or painful operations, being the means of health, are called good. And, with respect to societies, (in which public and private interests frequently interfere,) he is a good governor who promotes the former at the expence of the latter, who by the sufferings of individuals, when it cannot otherwise be done, provides for the peace and safety of a whole community. It is therefore necessary, in order to judge what is absolutely ill or good for a particular being, that we should know all its interests, and the whole of its existence; and to judge what is good or ill for a system, we should have a thorough comprehension of all its parts, with their relations and dependencies, and the last

SERM. result of all events concerning it. But with
III. respect to individuals of mankind, and much
more with respect to the whole rational creation, these are points quite above the reach of human understanding. Who can take upon him to say that an event is altogether bad, and was so intended by the directing cause, who does not know the connection it has with other events past and future, which if it were known, might shew it to be inseparable from a scheme *in the whole* most worthy of perfect wisdom and benevolence. And thus we see that the strength of the objection against the divine goodness taken from the appearances of ill or misery in this world, which has been represented as so formidable, rests wholly on the imperfection of our knowledge, which can never be a just foundation to reason upon, in the very points whereof we are ignorant. If it is proved by a multitude of instances which cannot be otherwise accounted for, that God is beneficent, and the contrary is supported only by bare appearances, which, when examined, we are sure may be consistent with goodness, nay the genuine fruits of it, and our experience leads us to believe it, at least probable, that they are really so, let any attentive impartial mind judge what the true conclusion is, and whether the
evidence

evidence of the doctrine we are now consider-
ing, does not remain unshaken. SERM.
III.

But though what has been said is a sufficient answer to the objection, we may proceed to farther considerations which strongly evince that all the imperfection and unhappiness we see in the world is consistent with the goodness of God, its maker and ruler. First, it can never be alleged with any pretence of reason, that the goodness of the Creator required all his creatures should be of one order, and equal in the degree of their perfections and happiness. That were to set limits to omnipotence and infinite wisdom, both which are gloriously manifested in a diversity of productions. Now if it was fit and becoming the wisdom of the Deity, to diversify the manifestations of his power by creating essentially distinct natures, with different capacities or different kinds and degrees of perfection, it necessarily follows, that the exercise of his goodness must be various, as suited to the condition of the beings which are its objects. How the glorious principle of divine benevolence displays itself in other parts of the universe, and towards superior orders of creatures, does not fall within our observation; but we see, that in this lower world there is not only a vast multitude of individual animals,

SERM. mals, but of different kinds; which shews

III.  the wise œconomy of providence, and gives such a multiform appearance to its bounty, as must raise in attentive minds a very high admiration of it, instead of being any reasonable objection against it. Shall we say that God is not good to all his creatures, because he has not made them all equal? or that the brutal kinds have no share in his bounty, because they are not moral agents? or, that mankind owe him no thanks, because they are in a mixt imperfect state? On the contrary, is it not rather to be acknowledged, that his goodness is the more conspicuous, by this variety; and that, by their different enjoyment derived from him, the creatures proclaim the riches of his beneficence, as well as the largeness of his understanding? There is therefore no ground of objection against the divine goodness from the natural imperfection of some created beings, from their inferior condition, and the lower kinds and degrees of enjoyment which are appointed for them.

But farther, It may be alleged, nay I am willing that the strength of the whole cause should be singly rested upon it, that goodness not only allowed, it *required*, that there should be different degrees of perfection and happiness among the creatures of God. This will

will be evident as soon as we reflect that a SERM.
scheme of *perfect equality* must of necessity III.
exclude all participation of that part of the
divine blessedness, *the communication of good*.
For where the same kind, and the same degree of happiness, is at all times possessed by all, there it is manifest, beneficence can have no place; being from the *nature* of such a state, in every instance, plainly impracticable. After saying this, I am something afraid, that the generous human heart can hardly have patience while I am going through with the argument. Indeed this kind of happiness which the objection has found out as the most perfect, and therefore fittest for the creatures of God, is the very same, and can be no other, than that indolent, unaffectionate, and altogether selfish enjoyment of existence, which the *Epicureans*, in high compliment, reserved for the Gods *themselves*. And so far these philosophers had certainly the advantage, that allowing this state of pompous ease to be fullest of felicity, it was but fitting and decent it should be ascribed to the Gods; and in consequence of it, that goodness being an active principle, incompatible with such divine repose, should be deemed unworthy of so delicate an habitation as the breast of such Deities. Wretched however at philosophising!

SERM. phising! where beneficence is in conclu-

III. sion required to be exterminated as an enemy to happiness. But let it be remembered that what lies at present before us, is not to give any direct proof that God is good. The evidence for this most important article of theism has been already produced: But it is only to shew, that the fact of subordination, and diversity in the degree of happiness, (which we see and know actually to take place in God's creation,) is so far from having any tendency to make void the former reasoning on that subject, that allowing that reasoning to be just, and that goodness is in truth an attribute of the Deity, it unavoidably follows, that there must have been instituted such a subordination. Can any thing be more plain, than if goodness be essential, (and if it be an attribute at all, it must be essential,) to the divine perfection and felicity, and be in its own nature communicable, that it must likewise be essential to the highest perfection and happiness that God can communicate: And consequently, that seeing goodness determines him to confer the highest possible happiness, goodness itself must be the cause of this subordination; without which this noblest, and truly divine perfection and felicity, could not have found any place in the whole circle of

de-

dependent being ; not one creature that could S E R M.
be the object of another's beneficence. This III.

is not the place for pursuing this argument unto all its consequences ; but from what has been already said, the attentive mind will be naturally led to infer, that the same cause that required a subordination at all, may be justly supposed to require that this subordination should be continued down through a vast variety of orders, so long as happiness was preserved superior in degree to imperfection ; or in other words, so long as existence can be pronounced a blessing, or preferable to that, which if it can be wished, is the most unnatural of all conceivable wishes, *annihilation*, or *not to be*. Observe here, a most pleasing instance of that perfect harmony and connection, that will always be found to subsist between the true principles of theism, and the reality or truth of things : An appearance which has often been talked of as a most shocking objection against the goodness of God, turns out upon a more attentive examination, to be the natural and inseparable consequence and effect of this very goodness.

2dly, As natural good and evil, or happiness and misery, are of various kinds and degrees ; and experience shews, that some of these opposite kinds and degrees may be mixt together

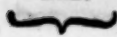
SERM. together in one state, the condition of any

III. being is to be denominated from the prevalence of either; and consequently the disposition of the agent, by whose appointment that condition is determined. Every state is to be acknowledged good, and the author of it benevolent, in which good prevails, though not without a mixture of evil; and which therefore is better than non-existence. Now this is so evidently the case of living creatures during the continuance of their being, that the objection against the divine goodness, taken from the imperfection of their enjoyments and their liability to pain, is fully removed by it. And for the difficulty arising from the shortness of their duration, it is answered upon the same grounds. For how unreasonable were it to allege that God is not good in giving life, because he intends to take it away? That a favour freely bestowed by him is not worthy to be acknowledged, because at a time appointed by his wisdom it is to be recalled? Or because an inferior life is shortened for the sake of a more important one, and by the wise administration of providence serves higher, more useful, and beneficial purposes, than merely its own enjoyment? Especially it is to be considered, that the short-lived animals, which as far as we know, are not

not destined to a future existence, give no discovery of their having any painful desires of it, or any anxiety about death, which may interrupt such present pleasures as they are capable of. SERM.
III.

3dly, As the state of man is what most immediately affects us, what we are best acquainted with, and concerning which we are the most capable of making a judgment, we may observe, that when the natural good and evil which we see and feel in it are compared together, and a just estimate made of the whole, it will appear that the former is the superior end of the divine administration, which therefore ought to be denominated beneficent from its principal and ultimate view. I observed before, that both in the animal and moral part of the human constitution, pains are salutary, and were by the gracious intending cause designed as means of safety and happiness. But it is farther most worthy of our serious consideration, that through the whole condition of being in this world, as under the government of almighty God, the same end, *our greatest good*, is uniformly pursued, by the discipline of his providence, in our afflictions. I take for granted, what every wise man will agree to, that virtue is the greatest good, the highest perfection and hap-

SERM. happiness of the human nature. Whatever

III.  therefore has a tendency to promote *that*, is for our good ; and may be attributed not to a malevolent design, but rather to the appointment of a gracious and compassionate father. Now experience shews, that such is our present infirmity, and we are liable to so many temptations of various kinds, especially in a prosperous and easy state of outward things, which affords the plentiful means of a free indulgence in the gratification of our lower appetites and passions, that very few of mankind maintain their virtuous integrity uninterrupted, and escape *the corruption that is in the world through lust*. At least it may be said of all universally, even of the best, that they are in danger of being misled from the paths of righteousness, and neglecting its superior pleasures, in a constant series of flowing worldly enjoyments. Therefore are divine corrections profitable to them ; and pains, sickness, and distresses of various sorts wisely dispensed by providence, tending to abate their relish of inferior gratifications, put the mind on pursuing the more noble and solid satisfaction which arises from the practice of virtue.

Besides ; Adversity is not only the means of instruction to men of amending their tempers and reforming their lives, as it brings them to
calm

calm reflection, and sensibly convinces them SERM.
III.
that the pleasures of the animal life are uncer-

tain, in comparison low, and unworthy of their eager pursuit; it is also the immediate occasion of the best exercises, and the highest moral improvements which the mind is capable of. Equanimity in all the changes of our outward condition; patience under sufferings of divers kinds and of a long continuance; resignation to the will of the supreme, perfectly wise, righteous and good governor of the world, and an unshaken confidence in him; with a benevolent disposition towards all mankind, even the most injurious; and a hearty persevering zeal for the publick good, notwithstanding many disappointments and continued ill usage;—These will appear to our thoughts, in speculation itself, the most lovely parts of a beautiful moral character: But the heart that is conscious of having practised them, has arrived to the very top of self-enjoyment, and possesses the highest felicity which the human soul in its present state can possibly attain to. Persecution or suffering for the cause of truth and virtue, which has sometimes happened to good men, seems to furnish a plausible argument against the equity and goodness of the divine government. But upon a thorough examination, we shall be sa-

SERM. tified that it is consistent, not only with per-

III. fect righteousness, but God's most tender and

compassionate care for his faithful servants. Virtue is far from being the less in their esteem, or yielding them the less satisfaction of mind, because they suffer for it: On the contrary, it is much endeared, and a greater confidence and security arises from it. For true goodness then appears in all its dignity and beauty, trampling over every thing that comes in competition with it; and it is impossible for the sincere, self-approving mind, to think that its cause, and the condition of its friends, however oppressed at present, can be always unhappy.

Again; The afflictions of some, especially of the virtuous, may be very useful to others, and the means of great publick good. It has been already observed, that extraordinary punishments inflicted on sinners are graciously intended by providence as publick warnings to the rest of mankind, that they may avoid the crimes against which the divine vengeance has been so signally testified. But the sufferings of the most innocent and righteous, however grievous they may be for the present, are sometimes also the occasions of their being more extensively useful than otherwise they could have been. Of this the history of

Joseph

Joseph affords us a very remarkable instance. SERM.

That good man, cruelly persecuted in his father's family, having narrowly escaped the

snare which his envious brethren laid for his life, was sold by them to a servitude which they (with great probability) thought would be perpetual and very wretched. But the wise providence of God so directed the event, that it proved not only the occasion of great prosperity to himself, but of preserving his own kindred, and indeed a great multitude of mankind who were otherwise in danger of perishing by a destructive famine. And he makes this wise and pious reflection himself on the whole amazing scene, that though his brethren had designed evil against him, yet *God meant it for good, to save much people alive*; which to a person of his humanity and goodness, did more than compensate all his sufferings. Though this instance is indeed extraordinary, and it is not to be expected that the issue of good men's afflictions will be generally parallel to it, yet it is very instructive, as shewing that however frightful and shocking the first appearances of sufferings may be, and however wicked the intentions of those who are the instruments of them, they are under the disposal of a wise and good providence, which knows how to bring good out of evil.

SER M. But the principal, and the most ordinary way

III. whereby the sufferings of the righteous are publickly useful, is by setting their virtues in a clear and strong light as examples. Integrity never shines with so bright a lustre, nor appears so amiable, as in a great trial of affliction. To see a man struggling with difficulties, to which, one would think, human strength is utterly unequal, oppressed with reproaches and injuries of all kinds, with a train of vexatious disappointments, with tormenting pains, and continually exposed to the very last extremities of suffering, yet still possessing his soul in patience, maintaining an undisturbed equanimity, and resolutely adhering to the cause of truth, and to his duty, by deserting which he might deliver himself out of all his troubles,—This is certainly the noblest testimony that can be given to virtue, and must leave a conviction of its excellence on every mind which is witness to it, and not stupidly insensible, or irreclaimably hardened, in a wicked course. How often have persecutors themselves relented, (not to mention spectators,) and even been won to the love of goodness by glorious examples of invincible fortitude, patience, and meekness in the distressed; and feeble irresolute minds, otherwise in danger of being led away with the er-

rors

rors of the wicked, been animated to a courageous and persevering steadfastness in well-doing? 'Tis true, that even in ordinary life, example has very great force: Perhaps nothing has contributed more to preserve the reputation of virtue, and to propagate it among mankind, than their seeing all excuses and objections against the practice of it effectually refuted by the unaffected piety, the hardy temperance, the inflexible justice, and diffusive charity of frail mortals like themselves, who have the same infirmity of nature, and the same temptations to the contrary vices. But still exemplary virtue shines more illustriously under trials: And as then the strength of good dispositions appears the greater, it must proportionably have the more powerful influence on others. Surely a good man will think all the adversities of his life amply recompensed, when they not only produce fruits so advantageous to himself, and are the means of his growing in virtue, but are so beneficial to mankind, tending to reclaim them from their pernicious ways, and to restore true piety and goodness among them. Who can deny that providence is beneficial to the human race, which makes the tolerable sufferings of a few individuals (therefore tolerable, because even during their incumbency, they are accompa-

SERM. nied with pleasures of a superior kind) and
 III. sufferings of a short continuance, as the Apostle speaks, *light and for a moment*, become so eminently useful, by serving those glorious ends which are worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness?

The sum of our answer upon the whole to this part of the argument is, That not only the appearances of natural evil or unhappiness, in the present state of things, cannot be justly objected against the goodness of the divine government, because they are not prevalent: On the contrary, every considerate person must be convinced there is more happiness than misery in the world; that all kinds of life in their natural state have enjoyment annexed to them, and pain only added as a means of their preservation; that happiness is the governing view in the human constitution; and the dispensations of providence towards men, in the general course and design of them, are for good; those, which for the present seem to be most grievous often tending to the greatest good. But farther, if some of these appearances were more difficult to be explained than they are, so that we could not see or conjecture any good to which they do or may tend, yet we could not reasonably pronounce them to be absolutely evil, and in the whole; expe-

experience in a multitude of instances teaching us, that good and evil of this sort are connected together, so as to be changed into each other. Now, if we take the whole series of events in the world as under one wise and good direction, and comprehended in the scheme of the divine providential administration, and if we allow what is so apparently reasonable, that one would think it cannot be denied, that nothing can be justly called evil, which in the event produces greater good whereby it is over-ballanced;—If I say, we allow this, who can have sufficient reason to assert that any event is absolutely evil, since it is impossible for the human understanding to comprehend all the relations and the remote issues of things? That which in our narrow way of thinking may seem the worst that could happen, may yet in the intire plan of the divine councils be necessary, and produce the best effects. God has given us such rules of action, and such notices of things, as are best accommodated to our condition of being, and the fittest to direct us so as we may answer its purposes; but he has not let us into the secret of his own designs, which are so complicated, and of so vast a compass, that our minds are utterly unable to comprehend them. This however we may safely rest in,

SER M. that if the supreme governing mind perfectly
 III. knows all things, past, present, and to come,
 with all their connexions and dependencies ;
 if the order of the world, and the harmony
 of things, shews him to be wise ; and prevail-
 ing good in it is a convincing proof of his
 benevolence, then all things, being under the
 direction of a wise and good Agent, are or-
 dered for the best ; and the contrary appear-
 ances, are no just objections against this, see-
 ing they are no more than *appearances*,
 amounting to no certain proof of absolute evil
 in the whole, but only of the defectiveness of
 our understandings. Nay, we may conclude,
 that the whole progressive scheme of nature
 and providence, comprehending all creatures,
 and the entire series of events which ever have
 been or shall be, is absolutely the best, and
 productive of the greatest happiness that could
 possibly be. For happiness being the proper
 object and end of benevolence, when this is
 accompanied in the agent with omnipotence
 and infinite knowledge, the greatest happiness
 in the whole, must be the intention and the
 effect. Is it not a contradiction to suppose,
 that a benevolent being would choose to exe-
 cute a scheme which he saw would produce
 a lesser measure of good, when another which
 he saw would produce a *greater*, was at the
 same

same time present to his mind, and equally SERM.
III.
in his power to accomplish?

But there is another kind of evil, to which and the consequences of it, the difficulty also relates, that is *moral evil*. Of this it cannot be said that God is the author, or that he does at all approve it; but yet upon the principle of his sole universal dominion, we must conclude, it was in some sense permitted by his providence, and that it was foreseen by him without his intending to prevent it, which he could have done. Nay, the most important measures of his conduct towards mankind, all known to him from the beginning, were formed upon the supposition of its being. Now the question is, how such a permission can consist with the moral perfections of the Deity? It is to be thought, that a being infinitely holy, and utterly averse to all moral turpitude, would not use his power to prevent it? That a being infinitely good, would leave his creatures unsupported against temptations to crimes which are ruinous both to themselves and others, which sully the beauty of his own works, and tend to defeat the design of them; nay, that he would place his creatures, frail and fallible, in circumstances wherein he foresaw they would fall from their innocence, and involve themselves in misery
to

SERM. to be inflicted as a punishment by his own
 III. avenging hand?

The answer usually given, and which, when fully and impartially considered, seems in a great measure to take off the force of the argument, is, that moral evil is wholly to be imputed to the creatures themselves who commit it; that it proceeds from an abuse of their liberty, or free agency, which is a high privilege of their nature, worthy of the wisdom and goodness of God to give to such creatures, most suitable to their condition of being, absolutely necessary to virtue itself, and to the happiness that arises from it, which is the greatest happiness they are capable of. It is not to be imagined, (which yet the objection necessarily supposes,) that the goodness of God, or his rectitude, require the exertion of his utmost power for preventing evil. His attributes are exercised in a perfect harmony; and he never does, (it may be said in some sense, he cannot do,) any thing, but what is agreeable to them all. His power, which cannot possibly be controuled by any opposite strength or resistance, is always, and must be directed in its exercise by wisdom; and it is not an indignity to his absolute omnipotence, to say, he cannot do any thing but what is fit and reasonable to be done. In like manner, holiness

linefs and goodnefs are to be confidered as per-
fections, or principles in the divine nature, SERM. III.

which exert themselves, not necessarily, but freely; or which do not require all to be done, in every instance, which can poffibly be done by absolute omnipotence, in order to accomplish their ends, or attain what they incline to. In this, as in other cafes, the wisdom of God requires that his operation fhould be according to the order which he has established, and to the nature of things which he has wifely framed to be preferved inviolable.

As in the government of the inanimate creatures, he acts *fuitably* to their natures, moving and difpofing of them by the irrefiftible determination of his fovereign will, fo his influence on moral agents is fuch as does not deftroy the effential powers which he has given them.

Let it be more particularly confidered, firft, that perhaps there is not, nor can be, any being of a limited understanding, above the poffibility of being miffed in its moral conduct; and all the orders of created free agents muft naturally be in a ftate of trial, till by a right ufe of liberty their integrity is confirmed. If it be fo, it does not neceffarily follow from the nature of liberty itfelf; nor is it a contradiction, that rectitude fhould be immutable, for the divine rectitude certainly is fo;

but

SERM. but it arises from the natural imperfection of
III. finite minds, and the fixed order of the divine
operation on created things, in a congruity to
their several natures.

Every imperfect agent, having a variety in his frame, must have propensions to particular objects which are adapted to the indigence of his condition; which propensions, in a regular moral constitution, are under the government of conscience, but their being does not depend upon it. They are excited by the presence of their suitable objects, or perhaps without it; and though their first motions, and perhaps their continuance in the mind for some time, may be innocent, yet it is easily conceivable that they may demand a gratification, in circumstances and degrees, which conscience forbids. Here then is a tendency or a temptation to evil, from which the creature by the right use of its own powers may escape, and thereby be more confirmed in virtue; but a possibility of falling and corrupting itself, seems to be inseparable from every finite nature; and even the danger of it seems naturally to attend the state of all finite moral agents, during some part of their existence. However that be, we know that we are possessed of such a liberty, that we are capable both of doing right and wrong;
and

and our moral powers so constituted, with S E R M.
such a freedom, we cannot help thinking a III.

very high privilege; whereby we are raised above the condition of many other beings, and have the essential foundation of noble enjoyments. Secondly, The human mind necessarily appears to itself the cause both of the moral good and evil which is done by it. When our hearts reproach us for doing wrong, we are conscious of no constraint, but that it was our own choice; and we were furnished with all the defences against it which we could expect or desire as free agents, and which might have been effectual, if we had carefully used them, and duly exercised our reason. When our consciences approve us for having done right, we are sensible that we acted with equal freedom, which is the very ground of inward satisfaction; and that no power is wanting to that moral integrity which yields true self-enjoyment. The mind therefore, I say, appears to itself the cause both of good and evil. The capacity is derived wholly from God, and is preserved by him; the particular determination is wholly from ourselves; only influenced, so far as is consistent with our free agency, by setting before us sufficient motives to good: Yet the mind has a natural power of making

SERM. a wrong choice. We must then be condemn-
 III. ed by our own hearts, in charging the human
 constitution as defective to the purposes of
 virtue, and thereby of happiness, and im-
 peaching the goodness of its author; since we
 are conscious to ourselves, ~~to~~ we are furnish-
 ed with all which is necessary, and know of no
 power that is wanting to our doing good and
 eschewing evil.

Thirdly, Whereas it is alleged, that since
 God foresaw men would abuse their liberty;
 that they would pervert that which is right,
 and thereby make themselves unhappy; good-
 ness seems to have required, that the occasion
 of such an abuse should have been prevented.
 The answer, so far as relates to the divine
 prescience, is, that it has no manner of in-
 fluence on future events, nor does at all af-
 fect the nature or the being of them. It
 ought not to be said that things are future, or
 certainly will come to pass, because they are
 foreknown, but they are foreknown because
 they are future. Events to come, as well as
 those which are present, or past, are known
 to God, just as they are in themselves, and in
 their intire causes. The whole series of ne-
 cessary causes and effects is seen by his perfect
 understanding from the beginning to the end.
 What he has determined to do by his own
 power

power is foreknown, as ascertained by that SERM.
determination. But the transgressions of his III.
creatures, of which themselves are the sole
causes appear quite otherwise: They are the
actions of free agents, the futurity of which
is no more determined by his appointment,
than the actual production of them is effected
by his power. As the bare knowledge of
crimes present, or past, does not communi-
cate the least degree of their guilt, but may
consist with a perfect abhorrence of them, and
the tenderest compassion for the offender, so
may the fore-knowledge of them when fu-
ture, unless something be omitted by the
prescient being which was necessary for pre-
venting them, and which was not only in his
power, but fit and reasonable for him to do.

Fourthly, It must be acknowledged that,
strictly speaking, it was in God's power to
have prevented moral evil altogether. If a fi-
nite intelligent being cannot be absolutely im-
peccable, yet he certainly could have created
moral agents much more perfect than men
are; given them a greater measure of know-
ledge; set the motives of virtue in so strong a
light before them, as more effectually to se-
cure their attachment to it; and he could have
placed them in a state much more free from
temptations, and consequently in less danger
of

SERM. of making defection. Nay, as liberty itself

III. is the gift of God, depending wholly on his pleasure, he could have prevented the abuse of it by withholding it altogether, if nothing else was sufficient, or he could have prevented the conjuncture of circumstances in which he foresaw liberty could be abused. But the question is, whether goodness and wisdom required that such methods should be taken; or rather, if upon the narrow view we have of the works of God and the whole system of the universe, we can pretend to judge that the present constitution, in this branch of it which relates to free agents, is inconsistent with the wisdom and moral perfections of the supreme Being? Shall we take upon us to say, that the order of the creation, and the ends for which it was made, did not require, or even allow that there should be such a rank of beings in it, constituted as we are, with understanding, liberty, and moral affections, but capable of sin, tempted to it, and thereby in danger of becoming unhappy through their own fault? If we suppose one in a superior condition of being, having an understanding vastly more enlarged than the human, and a more extensive view of the universal system, which comprehends many orders of created intelligencies with various degrees of per-

perfection and enjoyment, can we pretend to SERM.
affirm that it would appear to that mind in- III.

congruous in nature, that there should be such a species of rational creatures as mankind, with all the appointed weakness and imperfection of their present state; or even that it would not appear a very proper part of the divine plan, necessary to the beauty and harmony of the whole, variously related to the rest, and forming a scene wherein the perfections of the Deity are admirably displayed, and where good is the true character of the intire scheme? But though such a supposition is reasonable, and shews that our understandings are too weak, and our knowledge too scanty to comprehend this subject; consequently, with how little judgment men take upon them to censure the works of God, of which they know so little; we may consider the human constitution, and our whole state of being in this world, with all the advantages and disadvantages of it, in a way more accommodated to our capacity: that is, we may consider it by itself, abstractly from its relation to the rest of the universe; and even in that view, it will appear no uneligible thing, and that the good in it over-balances the inconvenience which arises from the danger that attends liberty. Would not one who consi-

SERM. ders the privileges of our nature, and the various enjoyment which belongs to the general condition of men, together with that measure of perfection and felicity which we have in prospect, if we duly use our own powers, and improve our opportunities, even though it be accompanied with the hazard of moral evil and unhappiness, (which is only to be incurred by our own fault but may be avoided if we are not wanting to our selves, and we may reasonably hope, from the goodness of God, for all necessary assistance in order to it;) would not, I say, one think this state in the whole, preferable to non-existence? And if it appears to us preferable, then it is to be acknowledged good, to the praise of the author's benevolence, notwithstanding its frailty and mutability; and although, in the event, it could not reasonably be expected, but that some of such an order of beings would fall into sin and unhappiness.

What has been said on this subject is agreeable to the explications given by the most eminent antient philosophers of the origin of evil. They attributed it, not to an independent evil agent, nor to *unqualified matter*, (into which some had absurdly enough resolved moral defects themselves,) but to what they called the *necessity of imperfect beings*: Meaning, that

that as all creatures must necessarily have some S E R M.
degree of imperfection; particularly, the ne- III.
cessary imperfection of created free agents im-
plies that they may possibly err, and act con-
trary to right, so the placing them in such a
possibility is by no means to be imputed to
any deficiency of wisdom and goodness in
God, but is the inevitable result of their na-
ture and condition of being; so that if they
should exist at all constituted as they are, it
must be in their power to do wrong. For
example, such a creature as man, compounded
of flesh and spirit, must have a variety of af-
fections; some higher, and some lower; some
which determine him to pursue the proper
perfection of his superior faculties as the chief
end of his being, and others which attach
him to the inferior part of his constitution,
which must also be preserved by his care, du-
ring the time appointed for its subsistence.
Since then, there are such different tendencies
in the nature of man, and liberty also essential
to him, he must be capable of acting diffe-
rently according to the different direction of
his instincts and affections; and his acting al-
ways right could not be absolutely secured, or
the possibility of moral evil avoided, without
such an interposition of almighty power, as
would import an essential change in his frame

SERM. and his state. In other words, if the divine
 III. perfections required that sin should be absolutely prevented, or not at all permitted, they required that such a being as man in a state of probation, should not be created: Which scarcely any considerate person will have the hardiness to affirm.

Another consideration of great importance for our rightly understanding this subject, and vindicating the divine perfections, is, that God over-rules the moral evil which his providence permits, so that it becomes the occasion of good. Tho' he has laid us under an inviolable law *not to do evil that good may come*, (for the evil we do, proceeding from corrupt affections, a profess'd intention of good by the same actions must be an absurd and utterly inconsistent pretence; nor have we any certain foreknowledge of the supposed good event, or power to bring it to pass;) yet is he under no such restraint by the perfect purity and goodness of his nature, but that he may suffer his creatures, (so far suffer, as not to hinder them by an irresistible exertion of his almighty power,) to deviate voluntarily from the rule of right, intending to take the opportunity from their errors, of manifesting his wisdom and other attributes in a glorious manner, and of producing effects in the whole beneficial to
 his

his creation. As the obligation of preventing evil must be limited in the manner before explained, to what is fit and reasonable to be done, without infringing the essential liberty of rational agents, (which is God's own rule of proceeding, and also the rule he has given us for regulating our conduct towards our fellow creatures; for he has not allowed us under the pretence of restraining them from sin, to encroach upon their freedom,) (no man surely imagines that charity requires or will justify him in it;) so instead of being inconsistent with the most perfect rectitude and goodness, it is a great demonstration of both, and of wisdom, to turn the follies and faults of men, in the event, to an occasion of promoting virtue and public happiness. Would it not be very commendable in any human government, from the very irregularities of subjects, in their own nature destructive, to take the opportunity of enacting wholesome laws, and forming useful schemes, which, with the tenderest pity to offenders should not weaken the public securities, but tend more effectually to promote the common good? There is indeed a great disparity between human governments and the divine in this respect, that their foresight of the behaviour of subjects is limited and uncertain, and therefore it is not in

SERM. their power, nor can they be obliged to take

III. effectual measures for preventing crimes:

Whereas God knows all things future as well as present with the greatest clearness and certainty. But this does not alter the case so far as it relates to the point we are now considering. For as his prescience is not the rule of his actions, but his perfect reason and the fitness of things; so on the other hand, the wisdom of human governors and their goodness would be justified, if they did foreknow future transgressions without interposing to prevent them by any methods of force, provided they could foreknow with certainty, and had it in their power to bring to pass from such transgressions, an increase both of moral and natural good; which we are sure God actually does, in many instances, and have reason to believe he does it universally.

We may consider then, what good the permission of moral evil appears to us in fact subservient to, at least the occasion of, and which it may reasonably be supposed that God intended. First, it is evident, that his own perfections are variously displayed in consequence of the sins of his creatures, and particularly of mankind. The perfect purity of his nature, or his aversion to evil, could not have appeared so fully if evil had never been;

been; nor his impartial distinguishing justice in rendering to all moral agents according to their works. And above all, his goodness by the occasion of sin shines marvellously; his patience is exercised towards his guilty creatures; he shows a *desire to the offending works of his hands, and is kind to the unthankful and the evil*, at the same time that he has an indignation against their crimes; and pardoning mercy, of which there could have been no notion in a state of innocence, appears now one of the most amiable glories of the Deity. It may be justly said, that the whole human race, though by corrupting their ways they have greatly altered their condition for the worse, yet they all continue in a state of trial, the objects of the divine goodness, which is not diminished by their sins, but exalted into pity; and that God has not left any of them without *witness of his mercy*, whereby they are invited to repentance, that they may be finally happy in his favour, tho' goodness has appeared in a distinguishing peculiar manner to some of them beyond others. If it be said, that supposing this to be true, that God has taken occasion from the sins of men to manifest his own perfections the more illustriously, it follows indeed that he has erected a monument to his glory; but how does it

SERMON. turn to the good of his creatures? I answer;

III!

that the glory of God and the happiness of the intelligent parts of the creation are inseparable; and whatever manifests the former actually does and was by him intended to promote the other. The displays of his power and wisdom, even in inanimate nature, must be supposed to have been principally designed for the benefit of rational beings in contemplating and enjoying it; for which purposes all the parts of the material world, known to us, are fitted in a wonderful variety. Much more the exercise of the divine attributes, (and especially goodness towards moral agents themselves,) has a direct tendency to excite in them, and also in other intelligent beings who are not the immediate objects of it, pious and devout affections, naturally accompanied with a high enjoyment; and thereby to promote virtue and universal rational happiness, more than in a different state of things there could have been occasion for.

Secondly, The permission of sin is so overruled by divine providence as to afford, by the consequences of it, an occasion for the various exercise of virtue; and thereby advancing the true perfection and happiness of the human nature. Sin has introduced these calamities and distresses into the world which try
the

the integrity of good men, their patience, and confidence in God; and these are the finishing and most amiable parts of a beautiful moral character. But this was before particularly insisted on. We may further observe, that the passions and frailties of men tending to animosity and discord, are directly and immediately the occasion to others of practising the most excellent virtues: They are the occasions of their exercising forbearance, meekness, and the forgiveness of injuries, all sum'd up in benevolence, the noblest affection of the mind. These virtuous dispositions, by thus variously exerting themselves, are greatly strengthened; and so the capacity of the mind for various rational enjoyments is enlarged. Every instance of their probation, and the resolved vigorous exercise of them against a contrary tendency or violent temptation, lays a foundation for farther improvement in goodness, and brings a return of true and solid pleasure; so that from this state of infirmity and discipline the mind naturally grows up to a more exalted virtue, and to an increase of happiness, which otherwise it could not be capable of. We know not indeed what room there might be for a diversity of virtuous exercises, even in perfect innocence, whereby good affections might be

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SERM.
III.

SERM. confirmed, and the satisfaction resulting from

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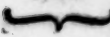
them increased. But we know that, in our present state, some very important branches both of piety and charity are occasioned by the moral imperfections of men, as well as by some degrees of misery; and that the practice of these virtues eminently contributes both to private and public good. Whereby it appears, that good and evil are wisely mixed together, and set against each other in the condition of mankind, and that the permission of evil, (so far as God does permit it,) is not unworthy of the best of beings; since his providence over-rules it, in the event, to the promoting of good, as an occasion of the most various and illustrious exercise of virtue, and of adding a high relish to the enjoyment which arises from it. And

Lastly, We may take the state of mankind, containing this puzzling appearance of moral evil, in another view, that is, as related to the rest of the rational creation; which, if it does not explain the difficulty, shews that, in all probability, the reason why we do not attain to a full and satisfying solution of it is, that the subject is above our comprehension, and that therefore the objection is founded not on evidence, but ignorance. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the affairs of this lower world,

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(principally those of its chief inhabitants,) have a relation to superior natures, and are extensively useful to the whole system of intelligent creatures. That there are in the universe other species of rational agents besides mankind, and above them, cannot well be doubted. When we consider the magnificence of the works of God; the vast fabric in which he has displayed his power and wisdom; that there are other globes at an immense distance from that where we dwell, and of incomparably greater magnitude; Who can imagine that they are all void of beings capable of rational enjoyment, and of celebrating the Creator's praise; and that this little earth is the only habitation of intelligencies? Now if there be a variety of particular systems in the moral as well as the natural world, and a diversity of administration in the divine government of them, they may have a mutual relation which we do not discern, and the affairs of one may answer purposes in another, and in the whole, which may surpass our present comprehension. As the state and situation of distant orbs render them useful to the earth, which may be also useful to them in a different way, all conspiring to make one regular harmonious system of material nature; the like order may be, and we have reason

SERM. to believe there is established, among the fe-

III.  veral kinds of rational beings, which under different particular oeconomies, do all of them together make one beautiful and moral system. Who then that does not comprehend the whole, can take upon him to censure a part? Can he pretend to judge, that this mixt imperfect state of ours is a blemish in the universal frame, when he does not know how variously it may be related, and what purposes it may serve in the kingdom of God, and what events may arise from it beneficial to the whole, in the scheme of providence? Nay, upon this view of things, (which is vastly too large for our narrow understandings,) can we possibly be sure, that the permission of evil among men is not a necessary part of the intricate moral constitution? This consideration may justly silence the impious clamours of short-sighted mortals against the wisdom and goodness of God, since it shows that they really amount to no more than this, that we cannot comprehend his counsels. And if we pursue our inquiries further into a future existence, where the last punishments are to be inflicted on men for their wickedness, (which our own foreboding thoughts naturally lead us to, and the scriptures explain it more fully as a most powerful argument to restrain men from

from evil,) of that state we can, at present, form but a very imperfect idea; the notices we have of it being only such as are intended for our advantage during our probation. But we may be assured that the most exact measures of rectitude, wisdom, and goodness will be observed in it. For if we have sufficient evidence that these perfections are the true characters of the active supreme mind which governs all, it would be unreasonable not to allow that they shall prevail every where and in every state; and consequently, that the last result of all the divine dispensations, comprehending the permission of evil, will be the greatest absolute good.

The sum of what has been offered upon the subject is, That God is not the author of moral evil, nor did he fore-ordain it in his everlasting counsels, as any part of his works: On the contrary, he always disapproves it as an irregular production, whereof the creatures themselves are the sole causes, and directly opposite to the essential rectitude of his nature. But as he permits it in time, so far as not to prevent it by such extraordinary interpositions of his omnipotence as would violate the free-agency of his rational creatures, (which free-agency is an essential part of their constitution,

S E R M.
III.

SERM. tion, necessary to their answering the ends of

III. their being; necessary to their practising virtue, their attaining moral perfection and rational happiness;) so he foresaw it from eternity, and he chose to execute that scheme of creation and providence, as in the whole absolutely the best, upon which he knew that moral evil was unavoidable. We ourselves plainly discern that the permission of sin actually is, in many instances, the occasion of good; that it may be so in many more instances and ways; but we cannot comprehend them, because we cannot see the infinitely various relations of things in the universe. Indeed this must necessarily be the case with imperfect understandings, that things must appear to them differently from what they really are. We may therefore conclude that the objection, as formidable as it may seem at first, does not affect the doctrine it is urged against, which is otherwise so well established; but that all the most shocking appearances of evil in the world, the oppression of innocence, the success of tyranny, the covetousness, pride, wrath, and superstition of men spreading desolation thro' the earth,—that, I say, these, and other appearances like them, may terminate in good. It has often been so, and the consideration
of

of the perfect goodness and wisdom of God, **SERM.**
whose power is irresistible, satisfies us that it **III.**
will be so universally. And for the miseries
of incorrigible finners in the other world,
they shall be no greater, than what public or-
der, and the universal good of the rational
creation, requires them to be.

S E R -

SERMON IV.

The Goodness of God explained and improved.

Mark x. 18.

There is none good but one, that is God.

SERM.
IV.

THE most important doctrine which our Saviour asserts in the text, that *God is good*, which the scripture constantly teaches, (and indeed the very being of religion depends upon it,) I have endeavoured to prove by the manifold and most visible fruits of the divine beneficence which are scattered over all the earth, among the numberless multitude of living things which are in it, and for which the liberal author of nature has plentifully provided, giving every one what is most convenient for it, an enjoyment suitable to its nature and capacity ; particularly, by the frame and constitution of the human nature, made for various happiness, and the administration of providence towards mankind. And I have endeavoured to vindicate

dedicate this doctrine against the objections SERM.
taken from the appearances of evil, both natu- IV.
ral and moral, which are in the earth. The

design of the present discourse is to explain this glorious attribute of the divine nature, and to shew what is the application, and the practical improvement we ought to make of it.

Now, in order to understand the more distinctly what is meant when we say *that God is good*, or attribute that perfection to the Deity, let us, first, consider the notion of goodness in general. And here we proceed upon a sure and clear foundation; for scarcely is there any thing of which we have a more distinct idea, no sensible being or quality is more easily perceiv'd: The mind of man as readily distinguishes between goodness and the contrary disposition in a free agent, as we know the difference between black and white by our eyes, or between other opposite qualities by any of our senses. Goodness then, in the strict and proper sense in which we are now considering it, (not as comprehending universal rectitude, which it is sometimes used to denote, and which constitutes the intire character of a good moral agent,) signifies benevolence, or a disposition to communicate happiness. This is the plain meaning of the word when we apply it to man, or any other

SERM. intelligent being. A good man is one who
 IV. from an inward inclination exerts his power
 in doing good; not who is the passive instrument or occasion of it, (which even an inanimate thing, incapable of any kind of intention may be,) or who acting for his own private interest, and from merely selfish motives, may be accidentally useful to the public or to some of his fellow-creatures; but he is a good man who acts voluntarily and of choice for the benefit of others, and his inclination and his active powers terminate upon that as their proper end.

In the same sense, though in an infinitely more perfect manner, and higher degree, God is good; that is, He is a being of kind affection, who from an inward principle of goodwill exerts his omnipotence in diffusing happiness far and wide, in all fitting proportion, according to the different capacities of the creatures which are the proper objects of goodness, and according to the direction of his most perfect wisdom. It is a very wrong notion which some have of the moral perfections of God, particularly his goodness, that they are high excellencies of his nature, not only superior in degree, and free from all infirmity, but wholly different in kind, from moral qualities in the creatures; having indeed

an analogy to them, because of their producing some similar effects, but no otherwise attributed to the Deity than as human passions are, in a figurative and improper sense; and in their real nature so transcendent, that our understandings cannot form a distinct conception of them, so that the words whereby they are expressed, have no such determinate idea annexed to them as when they are used for the moral dispositions of inferior agents. This has an unhappy tendency to destroy true practical religion; for it essentially consists in an imitation of the divine moral perfections, and a suitable affectionate regard to them, together with the genuine fruits of it in sincere obedience to the laws of God; all which must be defeated, if our apprehensions concerning the moral attributes are uncertain. If when we say that God is holy, righteous, true, and good, we mean only that he is something we don't know what, incomprehensibly high and excellent; which produces, it is true, some effects like those which the properties in men signified by these words would produce, but of the inward principle itself in the supreme mind we have no clear idea,—How can this be the object of our adoration, of our reverence, love, and esteem? We know distinctly what the goodness of other agents is;

SERM. that it means a disposition to do good to
 IV. others, or to make them happy; and this, in proportion to the degree of it, appears to us amiable. But if the goodness of God be not the same, only more perfect in the principle, and more extensive in the measure of its exercise than it can be in inferior beings, what is there in it to engage our affections and our gratitude? How, again, can we, according to this confused and undetermined sense of the divine goodness, make it the object of our confidence, which is an essential part of religion? And how can it be the rational foundation of hope and of inward security and peace to the human mind? All our expectations of good, considered as merely gratuitous, from any agent, are founded on the supposition of a benevolent principle in him. But if benevolence in God be a quite different thing from what it is in other good beings, so that we cannot distinctly perceive what it is, how shall we hope for any thing from him? And lastly, how can we follow God as dear children, and particularly, imitate his goodness (which certainly is a most important branch of our duty, and absolutely necessary to our pleasing him,) if we do not understand what his goodness is, or have not a determinate idea of it?

As I observed on the subject of the divine SERM.
universal rectitude, that the scripture doctrine IV.
represented God as holy, and explained where-
in his holiness consists, is perfectly agreeable
to reason, we may make the same observation
concerning the attribute of goodness in particu-
lar. For the scripture constantly represents
God as good, in the same determinate sense in
which other free agents are called good, tho'
in a more perfect degree ; that is, it represents
him as having a fixed disposition to communi-
cate good to his creatures ; it teaches us, that
his beneficence is the invariable principle from
which he acts, the fountain from which real
benefits are derived to us ; he is *the father of
lights, from whom every good and every perfect
gift cometh down.* Indeed the mind of man
finds a difficulty in forming just apprehensions
concerning the natural attributes of the Deity ;
our weak understandings are embarrass'd in
conceiving eternity and immensity. But for
the moral perfections, and particularly this
we are now considering, our ideas of them
are as plain, positive, and determinate, as of
any objects whatever : So that we may argue
from them, form our own expectations, and
found our confidence upon them with cer-
tainty, and imitate them with understanding.
Only let us observe in the

SERM. Second place, That we must take care not

IV. to impute to the supreme absolutely perfect Being any thing like human infirmity. There are weaknesses which cleave to our nature in every part of it, which accompany the exercise of all our powers, even our moral capacities, and best affections. To understand this the better, and that we may avoid the dangerous error of attributing any imperfection to the Deity, let us consider that there are two great principles of action in the mind of man, *benevolence* and *self-love*, which are really distinct, and form different ultimate ends, which we pursue without seeing, at least attending to any connection or dependence between them. Self-love determines us to seek private good, or our own happiness: By benevolence we are inclined to pursue the good of others. And this every man who seriously reflects, will find in himself, though in some it is weaker, and in some stronger, according to the degree of men's attention to it, and of its vigorous customary exercise, whereby it is confirmed, and its power encreased, the force of habit being added to that of nature. From this we gather, what are the ends of our being, I mean, for which God ordained it; and they are, *happiness* and *usefulness*. The gracious Creator intending that the individual should be happy, planted in every one

one self-love, by which all are carried to the SERM.
pursuit of that end; and he intended the good IV.
of the whole, and therefore united all men in
the bond of benevolence. But these two principles have each of them particular affections and passions belonging to them, in order to give them the greater efficacy in cases which most require their vigorous operation; and to answer the circumstances of our present state. The general desire of our own happiness is cool and dispassionate, directing to a regular uniform course of action. But there being a variety of things necessary or convenient for the present life which it would not put us upon seeking, using or avoiding, with the dispatch and earnestness that is required, therefore this want is supplied by particular appetites and passions, attended with an uneasiness sufficient to give them the needful force. In like manner, a common undistinguishing benevolence which unites us to the whole human species, nay to the whole system of intelligent beings, in itself a noble and very strong principle, yet is not sufficient to all purposes in the present condition of mankind, considering the imperfection of our understandings and other circumstances. Therefore there are particular instincts of the public kind planted in us, and many of them also are attended with uneasiness,

SERMON. ness to make them the more vigorous and
 IV. active. For example, the helpless state of
 children requires a peculiar care; and there
 is a strong affection to them planted in parents,
 which puts them upon running the utmost
 hazards and enduring extreme toil and pain,
 for the relief of their tender offspring. And
 because mankind in this world are liable to,
 and some of them actually fall into great dan-
 gers and distresses, therefore have we the com-
 mon, powerful, and painful instinct of *com-*
passion exciting and determining us suddenly
 to exert all our ability as the urgent need re-
 quires.

It is here that we must carefully distinguish,
 (as undoubtedly there is a great difference,) be-
 tween the goodness of God and men. The uni-
 versal, calm, and dispassionate benevolence,
 we may safely attribute to him in the strictest
 and most proper sense, having nothing in it
 but what is excellent and worthy of his trans-
 cendent glory; as the measure of it which
 our nature is adorned with, is in us the noblest
 part of the divine image. But we must not
 imagine that there is in the Deity any of the
 infirmity or uneasiness, which in men accom-
 panies particular kind affections: And when
 such affections are ascribed to him, as they fre-
 quently are in scripture, it must only be un-
 derstood

derstood in a figurative sense, by way of analogy, and we must take care to remove from our idea of them, all the imperfections and pains which we know by experience cleave to human passions, even of the most generous and beneficent kind. Thus, God is represented as our father, and as having a paternal tenderness for us; nay a greater, a more continually careful, and watchful love, than a mother has for her sucking child, which gives us a very high idea of his kindness: But we should be far from imagining any thing in him of the weakness or uneasiness which attends the affection of an indulgent earthly parent. His pity also is described in very strong terms. Alluding to the exertion of that instinct in the human nature, it is said, that *his bowels sound* for the distresses of his creatures, and that he is *afflicted in their afflictions*. But the meaning of all this is no more, than that his undisturbed benevolence continually exercised towards them, produces more perfectly the effects which the tenderest human compassion would produce, without the weaknesses and the pains of it.

Thirdly, It seems to be a just and necessary consequence from what has been already observed, that the goodness of God extends to all the proper objects of goodness. We know
nothing

SERM. nothing in ourselves, nor can imagine any

IV. thing in moral agents to limit that general
good-will, which must always appear to us
the glory of an intelligent nature. We know
nothing, I say, to limit it, but particular at-
tachments, and partial distinguishing affec-
tions, which are very useful in our present
state, because of its indigence and weakness;
but they always carry in them the idea of im-
perfection, and are therefore not to be attri-
buted to the supreme Being. From which
we conclude, that wherever there are fit ob-
jects of good-will, and he knows them all,
his good-will is exercised towards them.
And this, when we calmly consider it, raises
the divine beneficence high in our esteem; nor
could that attribute in any other view, or sup-
posing it more confined in its exercise, appear
to our minds so amiable, and so perfect. Now
if the whole system of beings that are the pro-
per objects of goodness, that is, which are
capable of happiness, be the intire objects of
God's kindness and care, it follows, that as
he is perfectly wise, and knows all the possible
relations, connexions, and dependencies of
things, his beneficence, in conjunction with
infinite wisdom, always determines him to do
what is best in the whole, or for the most
absolute universal good. How can it possibly
be imagined but that the most extensive bene-
volence,

volence, in a being perfectly intelligent, must produce the most extensive happiness, which is its proper fruit? And hence we further infer, that as in the present state of mankind, some unhappiness is mixt with all the good they possess; as some degrees of pain or uneasiness may be necessary to the greater good of individuals, and the sufferings of individuals may be necessary to the good of the whole, or to a general and more extensive good of many; so we may be sure that one or other of these is always the case in the divine administration, though not being able to comprehend the intricate scheme, we cannot see it in every particular instance;—We may be sure, I say, it is always so, that when any individual creature suffers, it is for the greater good of that creature itself, or for a more general good. And applying this to moral agents, the principal objects of the divine beneficence, whenever they suffer, as they do often by the hand of the *righteous judge of all the earth* for their faults, it is always either for their own amendment, (which is the greatest immediate good to them, and will end in their happiness,) or else it is for a more public advantage to the moral world.

What has been said, represents God as necessarily intending the greatest good of the rational creation; but that necessity must be understood

SERM. understood in a way consistent with the most

IV. perfect free-agency : It arises not from a defect of power or liberty, but from the absolute perfection of his moral attributes, and of his wisdom. There are some things which are commonly said to act necessarily, as inanimate beings, (though properly speaking they do not act at all.) So the fire burns, and the sun gives light ; and in beings endued with freedom, some of their capacities are not the subjects of that freedom. Thus we ourselves are conscious of liberty in acting ; but we are conscious, at the same time, that liberty does not belong to all the powers of our nature ; our understandings are exercised necessarily, and perceptions arise in them independently of our own choice. In like manner, we must conceive a difference between the natural and moral attributes of the Deity : He is *necessarily*, not only immense and eternal, but omniscient ; but he is *freely* just and good : These attributes belonging properly to his will, which is essentially free in its exercise, as the image of it is in the *liberty* of intelligent creatures ; they exert themselves not necessarily, (meaning by that, independently on his own choice,) but voluntarily, which makes them appear so amiable, worthy to be praised and admired, as the virtuous instincts of our nature

nature direct us to esteem *inferior* free-agents, who are beneficent and just. Still however it is as truly impossible, (though for a different reason,) that God should not be just and good, or that he should not exercise justice and goodness, as that he should be ignorant or weak, or even that he should cease to be.

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IV.

The point now under consideration is certainly of the greatest importance to the purposes of practical religion, to direct our sentiments concerning the conduct of divine providence towards mankind, to regulate our affections to God, and our expectations from him. On the one hand, we are not to consider the divine goodness, as if it were an unintelligent principle acting necessarily, (which supposition tends to destroy all true piety, all reverence and esteem of God, and gratitude to him; and as he is a being of the most perfect wisdom and rectitude as well as benevolence, we are not to entertain any expectations from him, but such as are worthy of his intire character, not to hope for any thing but what is reasonable and fit, and what it becomes the wise and impartially righteous, as well as gracious governor of the world, to give :) On the other hand, since the divine goodness is, and must be exercised towards all the proper objects of goodness, and in the best

SERM. best manner carries on the greatest absolute
 IV. good or happiness of the whole intelligent system, it is evident that God does not act towards any of his reasonable creatures in the way of absolute dominion. He is indeed absolute sovereign, who *can do whatever pleaseth him in heaven and earth*, whose power the united strength of the creatures cannot resist, *none can stay his hand, or say to him, What dost thou?* The inanimate part of the creation is under the sole command of his irresistible will; *he speaks and it is done, he commands and it stands fast*; but his will is always for good to the beings which are the objects of beneficence, that is, which are capable of happiness. No other reason can be assigned for bringing them into being, than that he was so good as to intend the communicating of happiness; and there is no other end pursued in the whole of his government over them. As the good rulers of civil societies, stiled in scripture Gods upon earth, are the fathers of their people, the true end of their authority is only the public good, to which they should continually attend, and which they should constantly aim at in the exercise of their power, in inflicting punishments as well as dispensing rewards, never acting from caprice, or a lust of domination, and merely to shew their

their own greatness, which is unworthy of a
wise governor ; so the government of the su-
preme Law-giver and Lord of the whole
world, of the goodness as well as greatness
whereof the best and the highest civil autho-
rity is but a faint image, is always invariably
conducted by the same rule, having no other
design than the greatest absolute good ; never
appointing any of his creatures to happiness or
misery, as an arbitrary sovereign, and merely
because he will, but according to the most
perfect wisdom equity and goodness, and so,
as in the best manner to promote the advan-
tage of the whole creation. Some expressions
of scripture have been interpreted to a diffe-
rent sense, and understood as signifying that
God appoints men even to final happiness and
misery, *merely* from an absolute will, with-
out any consideration of their behaviour. Par-
ticularly some expound *thus* these words of
the Apostle, *Rom. ix. 20, 21*, which are an
answer to the foolish cavils and complaints of
men against the equity of the divine govern-
ment over the nations of mankind;—*Nay but
O man, who art thou that repliest against God,
shall the thing formed say to him that formed
it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not
the Potter power over the clay, of the same
lump to make one vessel unto honour, and ano-
ther*

SERM. *ther unto dishonour?* But this passage has no

IV. relation to the exercise of God's authority, as judge in dispensing happiness or misery to the individuals of mankind, in which the measures of equity and goodness directed by wisdom to pursue the universal good, shall be exactly observed; but it relates to nations, and other great collective bodies of men, some of whom God raises up, bestowing high privileges upon them; and others he casts down, after having permitted them to continue long in their wickedness, abusing his patience, whereby his power and justice appear the more eminently in their destruction. The subject there treated of, is the rejection of the *Jews* from the national advantages they possessed as the people of God, and the calling of the *Gentiles*, which the Apostle resolves into the sovereignty of providence, and justifies his doing so, by declarations of the old testament concerning the difference God made between *Jacob* and *Esau*, without any consideration of their having done good or evil, which declarations evidently relate not to themselves *personally*, but to their posterity. As in all the works of God there is a beautiful variety; some have higher, some lower degrees of perfection, in which his wisdom and his supreme dominion are manifested; so his providence makes

a distinction among men with respect to gifts SERM.
and outward privileges: But he is good to all, IV.
and will judge every one of mankind with the
most impartial equity, according to the im-
provement they made of the talents commit-
ted to them, and their obedience to the laws
they were under.

Lastly, The only principle from which we
can conceive God acts towards any object
without him, or towards any or all of the crea-
tures which derive their beings from him, is
goodness. When we reflect upon ourselves,
(and it is by attending to our own powers and
affections of which we are conscious that we
take our rise to the consideration of, and form-
ing such a judgment as we are able to form
concerning superior intelligent natures, and
even the supreme,) we find, as has been al-
ready observed, two general springs of action
in our mind, *self-love* and *benevolence*. All our
particular desires, affections and passions may
be reduced to these two, and are comprehend-
ed in them. We cannot, I think, help judg-
ing after the same manner concerning all other
beings like ourselves, that is all free-agents,
that they constantly pursue either their own
good or the good of others. For we have no
notion of any other springs of action than af-
fections (or some principles analogous to af-

SERM. sections in us) which constitute the ends of
 IV. rational action; and no agent can have any object of affection, but either himself or some other being. Now, applying this to our conceptions of the Deity, and his manner of acting, we cannot imagine that he acts for himself in the sense we are now speaking of; that is, that in any of his works, or in any fact which terminates on other beings, he pursues his own happiness, in such a sense as to imply indigence, and that his happiness depends on something without him. A being which is self-sufficient, and absolutely perfect and blessed, and who was so from eternity before any thing besides himself subsisted, cannot want any thing to make him happy, and therefore cannot be supposed to design the supply of his own wants in any thing he does. What can any creature possibly give him, or what can he receive from it? He was perfectly satisfied in himself, and in the contemplation and enjoyment of his own infinite excellencies from everlasting, and therefore must be supposed to act towards all things without him, from a motive of mere goodness.

It may be alleged, that as the Deity is interested by his goodness itself in the affairs of his reasonable creatures, he has complacency in their happiness, which is originally his own gift;

gift ; he is pleased with their good moral conduct, and that felicity which is the result of it, and the contrary is displeasing to him ; we can hardly avoid apprehending that his enjoyment has some dependence on their behaviour and their condition. For if we form our notion of the perceptions and sentiments of other intelligent beings, by a regard to what we find in ourselves, we do not know how to separate the approbation of a good moral character, and the happiness consequent upon it, from pleasure ; and the disapprobation of a bad character with a sense of the misery that follows it, from some degree of uneasiness. It may therefore be supposed that God foreseeing these opposite events which must differently affect him, *for his own sake* determined to choose the one, and do whatever was fit for avoiding the other ; that is, acted not merely for the good of his rational creatures, but for himself or his own enjoyment. If this reasoning be ever so just, it does not, nor ought to diminish in our esteem the benevolence manifested in the work of creation, and the good communicated to the creatures. Is any being accounted the less beneficent because he finds pleasure in his beneficence ? Is any man the less generous and disinterested in supplying the wants of the indigent who

SERM.
IV.

SERM. can be no way profitable to him, because he

IV. has, and knows before hand he shall have
 satisfaction in his liberality? Much less can the
 complacency which the supreme independent
 Being has in the manifestation of his good-
 ness, be thought any diminution of that good-
 ness, or be any pretence for alleging that he
 acts from selfish motives, as if he wanted any
 thing, the communication of good being the
 immediate end of his works, chosen for its
 own sake, and not from any *indigence* of his.
 Besides, the changes which happen in the
 condition of the creatures, their acting right
 or wrong, their being happy or miserable,
 should not be imagined to affect the Deity,
 tho' perfectly perceiving them, and perfectly
 pure and good, in the same manner as they do
 good men, or any other finite good agents.
 They have, and cannot avoid having, new
 affections excited by events to them intirely
 new; pleasure arising from present good, pain
 from present evil, which they had not while
 it was future. But he to whose mind nothing
 has any appearance different from what it had
 in his eternal fore-knowledge, possesses the
 same unvaried tranquillity in all the vicissi-
 tudes of time. The whole series of events,
 in the foreseen order, passes under the obser-
 vation of his eye without any alteration or
 exci-

exciting any emotion in his undisturbed perfect mind. He is capable of no surprise, no painful sensation of *sorrow* from any calamity, or of *resentment* against any moral disorder, nor properly of *joy*, as that signifies a new sensation of pleasure, from any good which arrives. All things which come to pass are comprehended in the scheme of providence which was formed in his eternal counsels; and as the appearances of evil were not unexpected, they produce no uneasiness. And the afore-appointed good issue is the subject of his everlasting, delightful, serene contemplation, not heightened by its arrival, as it is in weak minds, to surprising and tumultuous delight. Upon the whole, since all the good that is in the creatures, natural or moral, is originally from God, and all the enjoyment to *him* which can be supposed to arise from it, is the result of his own operations, always the same and uninterrupted; it may be properly called self-enjoyment inseparable from his own perfections and the exercise of them; and therefore the end of his works, is not the acquisition of felicity from other beings, but the communication of good to them, or in other words, the principle is *benevolence*.

SERM. It is commonly said that the *glory of God*
IV. is the end of the creation and of all his actions towards the creatures. And if this be the meaning—that all his actions, his forming the world, and his whole administration in the government of it, is worthy of himself, becoming the most excellent and perfect of all beings, and that his perfections are manifested in conjunction, and in a beautiful harmony by all his works, it is just, None of the divine attributes is exercised singly. As *eternal power is clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made*, the same things manifest eternal wisdom; and as goodness is evidently the character of God's government of the moral world, the most perfect rectitude shines in it with equal lustre. In this sense, he is glorified in all his ways, and all his works; and in his eternal counsels, he intended it should be so. But if we enquire concerning the principle from which the supreme Being acts in framing and disposing both the material and the rational creation, the former evidently subservient to the other, I think it appears from what has been already said, that it can be no other than benevolence; and consequently the end is no other than the communication of perfection and happiness, which he diffuses through all the universe, in such measures;

fures, and with such variety, as at the same time to manifest his glorious power and wisdom. SERM.
IV.

But though it may be said, (in the sense just now mentioned,) that the glory of God is the end of his works, and of his eternal purposes, we should take care to avoid another, and a very wrong meaning of that expression. Let it be far from us to entertain any such thought concerning him, as if he had any thing like the ambitious views of weak mortals, to raise monuments to his honour. The desire of honour is indeed an original desire in *our* nature, and a very useful part of our constitution; having a tendency to the support of virtue, and to the public good: But it carries in it the marks of insufficiency and dependence. The great God is therefore infinitely above the need of it; and it is beneath the high perfection of his nature to act from such a motive. We cannot, I think, but acknowledge in our hearts, that to act from a principle of pure disinterested goodness, and with the sole design of communicating good, is more excellent and amiable; and to conceive thus of the Deity, is to conceive of him the most highly and honourably, which is the best rule we can follow in forming our apprehensions concerning him. It is true, God requires that

SERM. his reasonable creatures should make his glory
 IV. the end of their actions; that they should honour him with their devout acknowledgments, and the outward signs of adoration, which will appear to themselves a reasonable service, and what the best principles in their nature direct them to. But even this he requires for their sakes, not his own; and the affections he has planted in their nature whereby they are determined to it, bear the plainest marks of his goodness, for it is their most delightful exercise, and affords the highest enjoyment they are capable of.

What has been said under this last head, shews us the reason of the assertion in the text, that none is good but God: Which is not to be understood absolutely, for there is real moral goodness in some creatures; but the supreme Being alone is *essentially* and *immutably* good, the sole original fountain of all goodness and happiness. And this is peculiar to him, that whereas from the limited condition of all other intelligent agents, it necessarily follows, that their own happiness must be an object of their pursuit, and an end of their actions, (they seek it from God, and they receive it from him) he, having in himself an underived sufficiency for his own unchangeable blessedness, infinitely above the
 need,

need, or even the possibility of an addition SERM.
 from any other cause, acts purely and wholly IV.
 from a principle of benevolence. I come, }

In the next place, to consider what is the proper application and practical improvement of this whole subject. And, first, we and all intelligent creatures are indispensably obliged to praise God, to *call upon our Souls, and all that is within us, to bless and magnify him.* This is a tribute which our own reason, and the instinct of gratitude planted in our nature, will teach us to pay to him, as a kind and gracious benefactor. We cannot indeed but highly esteem a beneficent disposition wherever it appears, though we ourselves do not partake of the benefits which flow from it. What acknowledgments then are due to the universal benefactor, the original author of all happiness, to whose favour we ourselves owe our being, and all the enjoyments we possess, and on whose bounty all our future hopes depend? His compassion to us is not lessened by the diffusiveness of his liberality to other beings: We are as much and constantly cared for by him, as if we were the sole objects of his care. And since in an infinite variety of creatures, which are capable of enjoyment, not one is neglected, he gives to all that which is convenient for them, Those, whose

SERM. whose faculties enable them to discern his

IV. hand so freely opened to distribute various happiness, ought to join according to their several capacities, in celebrating the glory of his benignity. Particularly, as an affection for our own species is natural to our minds, and inseparable from them, when we consider God as the common father of mankind, doing good to them, and leaving none of them without witnesses of his tender pity, He must in that view appear very amiable to us, most worthy to receive our united thanksgivings and honour. The narrow notions which some have of the divine goodness, as if it were confined to a few while others no less capable are overlooked or rejected, and which tend to change the idea of the attribute itself into that of arbitrary will,—These notions, I say, seem to take their rise from the selfish desires too prevalent in some minds, of enjoying happiness by way of peculiar property and distinction from their fellows. But to a well-disposed benevolent heart, the more extensive beneficence appears, the more it is esteemed; and there cannot be a more delightful object of its contemplation, than the mercy of God dispensing its gifts freely to every individual of the human race, reaching out its unsparing hand to supply all their wants, and making
ing

ing no other distinction than what arises from SERM.
the different qualifications of the particular IV.
objects, and what wisdom requires to be made
for the greater advantage of the whole. This,
which I hope has been sufficiently shewn to
be the just way of thinking concerning the di-
vine philanthropy, challenges our most affec-
tionate esteem; indeed should raise it to the
highest admiration. And when we consider
that the love of God is the only spring of our
happiness, indeed all happiness; and that he
does good, not like needy creatures, who give
hoping for something again, (the very best of
them, not unreasonably, nor to their re-
proach, seek the continuance and increase of
their felicity as not immutable and absolutely
perfect;)—when we consider that the only
principle of *his* actions is pure benevolence;
and his kind intentions terminate on the happi-
ness of other beings, the greatest and most uni-
versal happiness as their ultimate end; do not
our most exalted praises, the utmost gratitude
of our souls, sink far beneath what we must
acknowledge to be due? *What shall we ren-
der to the Lord for all his benefits?* What re-
turns can we make, which shall bear any pro-
portion to the kindness of his unmerited af-
fection, or the sovereign freeness of his
mercy, and the extent of its fruits, for both are

not

SERM. not only unparalleled, but exceed our com-

IV. prehension? Surely it becomes us to celebrate his glory, and to offer him the sacrifice of our thanksgivings, with sincerely willing and joyful hearts. No one can imagine that the praises of our lips only, or the mere external professions of gratitude, are a suitable or will be an acceptable acknowledgment of his favour. What goodness,—such unexampled goodness first of all demands, is true undissimulated and superlative love, which will naturally arise in our minds, if we carefully attend to the motives of love contained in the character of the object, and particularly his benignity; and if we do not suffer ourselves to be diverted and prepossessed by an immoderate indulgence of selfish affections. Accordingly this is the sum of religion, to which the divine goodness is the strongest motive, and as our Saviour calls it, the first and great commandment; * *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,* that is sincerely, and constantly.

Secondly, The goodness of God is the proper object of our reverence and fear, as well as love. Thus the prophet † *Hosea* describes the religion of the *Israelites in the latter Days*, after that long afflictions, and other methods of

* Matt. xxii. 37.

† Hof. iii. 5.

of divine instruction shall bring them to juster sentiments and better dispositions, than those which prevailed among them during their degeneracy, *They shall fear the Lord and his goodness.* Such a perfect character as that of the Deity, comprehending all moral excellencies, and particularly glorious benevolence, calls for the most awful respect of all attentive minds: And an ingenuous heart will be afraid of offending him, for this very reason, because he is so good, and will conceive an indignation against sin on this account, that it is not only a dishonour done to the supreme law-giver, but ingratitude to the best benefactor. Who would not be ashamed of such baseness, as to provoke and affront one who is continually kind and beneficent even to the unthankful and the evil, and always heaping favours on the undeserving? These two principles, the love and the fear of God, are the great security of our duty, and will be the lasting springs of sincere obedience to his commandments. The scripture constantly teaches us, (and it must be very evident to the reason of men,) that pious affections, gratitude and reverence to the best of beings, are in vain pretended to, without the practice of virtue. This is the love of God, and this is his fear, that we do his will; that we fulfil the works
of

SERM. of his law *written in our hearts*, and declared

IV. in his *word*, by living soberly, righteously, and godly in this world. And this consideration of the divine goodness shows the folly of sin, as well as ingratitude and baseness. For how unreasonable is it that men should transgress those commandments which are given them merely for their own sakes, and to make them happy? All the bad effects of their disobedience and provocations must fall upon themselves. * *If they sin what do they against God? or if their transgressions be multiplied, what do they unto him?* The sole intention of his laws is their good; of which they may deprive themselves by their wickedness, but cannot affect his unchangeable happiness, which has no dependence on any thing in their power.

Thirdly, As to the goodness of God we owe our being, all the powers of our nature, the privileges of our condition, and whatever happiness we possess, so it is the just object of our affectionate confidence, and the only foundation of our hope for the future. What security can we, or any creatures have, that our existence and all the advantages and enjoyments we have, shall be continued, or our felicity increased, but that the *father of lights from whom every good gift comes down* is without

* Job xxxv. 6.

out variableness or shadow of turning. But SERM.
IV.
let it be remembered, that we are not to entertain expectations from the divine goodness, as if it were an unintelligent proneness to communicate benefits: It is exercised with freedom and the manifestations of it are always directed by the most perfect wisdom. And since the intire end which the good governor of the world pursues is the greatest absolute good, or the highest happiness of the whole rational system, it is unreasonable to expect a profusion of beneficence towards every individual, in such a way, and upon such terms, as would be hurtful to the whole. But it ought not to be said, that this renders our hopes with respect to ourselves utterly uncertain, since we, not being able to comprehend the scheme of the divine administration cannot conclude concerning any particular supposable event, however grievous it may be to us, or other individuals, that it is inconsistent with the most public good, and therefore our confidence in the most perfect goodness, thus explained, cannot make us secure against it. For, besides that doing all for the best, must appear amiable to us in the supreme agent, our minds necessarily approve it, and we ought therefore to acquiesce in it with pleasure, it cannot be reasonably imagined that the extreme insupportable

SERM. portable unhappiness of individuals can be ne-

IV. cessary to the good of the whole, excepting
 one case which our reason sufficiently instructs
 us to be aware of, and we have it in our power
 to prevent it. The case is this, we are sure that
 for God to make no difference between good
 and evil in moral agents, and to communicate
 as much happiness to the vicious and wicked as
 to the best and most virtuous, that this would
 not be for the greatest good of the world, but
 destructive of it, as tending to take away the
 greatest encouragement to, and to subvert the
 very foundations of virtue, which is the true
 happiness of rational creatures : And therefore
 for men to pretend, that they trust in the good-
 ness of God, while they live in contempt of
 his laws, and persist impenitently in their
 wicked courses, is the highest presumption ;
 such expectation of favour from him being con-
 trary to the reason of things, and the esta-
 blished order of his government, and incon-
 sistent with goodness itself directed by wis-
 dom, which requires that a distinction should
 be made between the righteous and the wick-
 ed by the judge of the world, at such time,
 and in such manner as he sees fit, and that
 transgressors should be punished for the safety
 and benefit of the whole. But if we faith-
 fully and constantly adhere to our duty, and

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our hearts do not condemn us, then *have we confidence towards God* on a solid foundation, that SERM. IV.

however, in the present state, *all things come alike to all, and there is one event to the good and to the sinner*, yet finally, and in the main, it shall be *well with the righteous*, and that happiness is inseparably connected with virtue.

It amounts to the same thing, if we set this point in somewhat a different light, and consider the presumptuous and pretended hopes of impenitent sinners in the mercy of God, as inconsistent with the notions which reason, as well as the scripture teaches us of his other attributes, his wisdom, his justice, and the essential rectitude of his nature, which will not suffer us to believe that he will always, and in the whole of his administration, heap his benefits without distinction on the righteous and the wicked. Nor is this any reflection on his most perfect goodness, which requires to its exercise a proper qualified object. As the only object of power are things possible, and the only object of wisdom are things reasonable and fit, so among moral agents, the only qualified objects of the divine goodness, in the sense here spoken of, that is *approbation*, are the sincerely virtuous. And as the perfections of the Deity are exercised in a perfect harmony, infinite power never does,

SERM. it may be said, cannot do, what is disagree-
 IV. able to wisdom or to the moral attributes, so
 the moral attributes never interfere with each
 other : Goodness is not manifested in such an
 undistinguishing manner, as to dishonour the
righteousness of the supreme ruler. But of all
 finners they are the most inexcusable, and
 have the least reason to expect the divine fa-
 vour, who presuming upon it, take encour-
 agement from thence to continue in their
 disobedience, who, as the scripture ex-
 presses it, * *Turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*, and † *because sentence against evil works is not speedily executed, therefore wholly set their hearts to do evil*. Such have reason to expect a peculiarly severe punishment, and that, as *Moses* speaks, ‡ *The Lord will not spare them, who hearing the words of his law, bless themselves, saying, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imaginations of our hearts* : or, as *St. Paul* teaches, || *They who despise the goodness and forbearance of God, which should lead them to repentance, and persisting in the hardness and impenitence of their hearts, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. And,

Lastly,

* Jude iv.
 19, 20.

† Eccles. viii. 11.
 || Rom. ii.

‡ Deut. xxix.

Lastly, We should always endeavour to imitate the divine goodness. That which is the glory of the supreme Being, and adds a lustre to all his other perfections, must even in the inferior degree in which the reasonable creatures are capable of it, be the highest excellency of their nature. And accordingly, beneficence is always regarded among men as the noblest quality, as that which signifies the most perfect character, and procures the most universal esteem. * *St. Paul*, agreeably to the general sense of mankind, makes a distinction between the righteous and the good man; the former is justly valued, but the other appears much more amiable and praiseworthy. And as thus we shall be perfect like our heavenly father, and obtain the approbation of men, the consciousness of having merited it and of possessing that excellent quality, always shewing itself by its genuine fruits, will always yield the greatest inward peace and security to our own minds. We shall reflect upon it with pleasure, and look forward to eternity with confidence, for God will surely reward them who follow his example; who with sincere affection pursue the great end of his own administration, *the universal happiness, and are merciful as he is merciful.*

SERM.
IV.

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SER-

* Rom. v.

S E R M O N V.

The Justice of God explained and proved.

Psalm lxxxix. 14.

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.

SERM.
V.

JUSTICE has always been considered by wise men as one of the principal moral virtues. It contributes eminently to the universal good of mankind; for without it the peace and order of societies could not possibly subsist, nor could any individual enjoy the privileges of his nature, and the advantages of his condition with safety. It is one of those qualities belonging to human dispositions and actions which we necessarily approve; and the things which are just, always appear virtuous and praise-worthy. We conclude therefore, that justice has the sanction of God's own authority, and is an essential part of his law of nature: And since we conceive in it an absolute excellence every way worthy of his supreme dignity

dignity and glory, we attribute it to himself, S E R M.
and number it among his moral perfections. V.

'Tis true, there is a great difference between the exercise of justice, and even the foundations of it, in God and in men. For there being an equality among *them* in their most important interests, they have all demands of right one upon another, and fundamental privileges not subject to any human authority, which cannot be invaded without iniquity. Whereas no creature can lay *him* under any previous obligation, nor have an independent title whereby they may claim any thing from him; for their very beings, and all they have in possession or expectation, are his gifts. But since it appears in his own constitution, that there is an established relation of persons and things, and a fitness resulting from it that the condition of moral agents should be according to their behaviour, we may be sure he will preserve that relation inviolable, and always act agreeably to that fitness, or that *the judge of the whole world will do right*. This has been ever received as an essential principle of religion: Indeed if it be denied, the foundations of piety are destroyed at once, and there can be no such thing as a rational fear of God. It is elegantly expressed and strongly asserted by *Elibu*, as a point wherein all men of un-

SERM. derstanding are agreed,—* *Far be it from God*

V. *that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* In discoursing on this subject, I will first endeavour to give you a true notion of the justice of God, and to prove that it is an absolute perfection of his nature. Secondly, to shew, more particularly, in what instances it is exercised.

First, To shew what is meant by the justice of God, and to prove that it is an absolute perfection of his nature. In explaining the divine attribute of goodness, I observed that it is the sole principle from which the supreme Being acts towards the proper objects of it; that is, all sensitive and intelligent creatures, and that it extends to them all,—That he being infinitely above all indigence or the need of any thing from without to the continuance or increase of his self-sufficient, most perfect, and unchangeable happiness, always exerts his power in forming and disposing of things purely from a motive of benevolence, and with an intention not to receive but to communicate happiness;—and that the intire adequate ob-

* Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12.

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object of the divine beneficence is the whole system of living things ; to all which he does good in fitting proportion, according to their several capacities, especially the rational system or the moral world, for the universal happiness whereof he constantly provides in the best manner, diffusing his bounty to each individual, under no other limitation than what arises from the wise design of subordinating it to the most public good. If this be so, justice can be no otherwise considered than as goodness towards moral agents regulated in its exercise by wisdom ; or, as wisely, and in the most proper manner pursuing, not the private and separate, but the united good of all intelligent beings. And indeed this is the worthiest, and most becoming notion we can have, of the just and wise administration of the universal sovereign *Monarchy*, to which its low image, the idea of a good human government naturally leads us. For the chief, nay the sole end of civil authority being the good of the community over which it is appointed, and the good of particular persons, whether magistrates or subjects, so far only, as it is consistent with and subservient to *that* ; all acts of power ought to pursue it uniformly, and ought to be so designed by the persons with whom power is entrusted. What

SERM.
V.
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SERM. then is the justice of a human governor? No-
 V. thing else than his promoting to the best of
 his understanding, the safety and happiness of
 the society. Not only justice is to be exercised
 consistently with that design, but affection to
 the public is the true principle of it, and the
 public good should be its ultimate end. The
 sole motive to the inflicting of necessary pu-
 nishment should not be passion, or a regard
 to the supposed rights and honour of *affronted*
Majesty as a separate interest; but the same
 goodness of disposition, or benevolence to the
 collective body, and desire of promoting the
 general welfare, which in other instances
 (where it can be safely done,) produces effects
 that give pleasure to all as far as they can
 reach, without putting any one to pain. In
 like manner ought we to form our concep-
 tions concerning the justice of God. Having
 an unlimited dominion over all intelligent be-
 ings, he is inclined by the benignity of his
 nature to do them the greatest good, and to
 promote their most extensive happiness. But
 that same benignity of his nature, exerts itself
 freely with perfect wisdom, and therefore dif-
 ferently, according to the diversity of their
 conduct and circumstances; it shews favour
 or communicates pleasure to qualified objects,
 having for its ultimate end the producing of
 the

the greatest monument of good. It with- holds favour, or inflicts punishment on the particular unqualified objects of happiness, for the same ultimate end, the producing of the greatest good. In other words, the divine *justice* or *righteousness*, (however it may be differently apprehended as a distinct property, and it may be usefully so represented,) yet really is nothing else but his goodness directed to its exercise by infinite wisdom to pursue its proper end, the greatest and most absolute good of all rational beings in the best manner, and with that diversity in its administration, which their different behaviour and circumstances require.

We ought, above all things, to avoid imputing to the Deity infirmities and passions like those we find in ourselves, and which often corrupt the springs of action, even mixing themselves with good dispositions. I observed before, in explaining the goodness of God, that besides the principle of benevolence in the human mind determining it to seek the public happiness, there are likewise particular instincts planted in our nature, *not* selfish, but inclining us to assist and relieve our indigent fellow-creatures; such as compassion and natural affection, which are attended with weakness and perturbation; and these

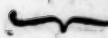
SERM. these we ought not to attribute to God, except in a figurative sense and by way of analogy. We have at least equal reason to avoid attributing to him painful and disturbing resentment, which often arises in the human mind against moral evil; which, so far as it proceeds from the constitution of nature and is faultless, seems to be intended as an excitation to justice. The supreme mind is altogether free from what is strictly and properly called wrath, and from the least degree of uneasiness, in disapproving the faults of his creatures; and when it is necessary to use the chastening rod, or even to proceed to the severest punishment, he does it with the same undisturbed calmness, and the same benevolent disposition, which is manifested in those which we call acts of clemency and mercy.

This I take to be the true notion of the divine justice, setting it in the most amiable light, and representing him as what he truly is, *the best of beings*. Nor does it give the least encouragement to sin by diminishing our apprehensions of its penal effects. For surely it does not alter the nature of punishment or abate its severity, to say that goodness requires it: But our judge must appear to us the more venerable, when we consider him as not depriving any one being of the happiness it is capable

capable of, but for a greater and more general good. To explain the exercise of this attribute otherwise, and represent it as ultimately intending the *honour* of God, of his *majesty*, and *authority*, as the end of his administration, distinct from, and superior to the greatest good of intelligent beings,--This is to render it less intelligible, and less agreeable to the best sentiments of our minds. For they must esteem that government the most excellent and perfect, which pursues the most public happiness as its last end, and not the glory of the sovereign, as an interest different and separated from it. But however that may be, and supposing that *justice* and *goodness* are to be considered as distinct attributes of the Deity, yet still they are inseparably joined together in his perfect moral character, and their interests never interfere, nor are they exercised inconsistently. Divine justice is not so rigorous as to demand any thing contrary to goodness; nor is goodness so indulgent as to require any thing which justice does not allow, no more than infinite power and wisdom towards each other. And it must be remembered, that we have a clear and distinct idea of justice as well as of goodness, and of certain invariable measures to be always observed in the exercise of it; otherwise it can be of no use to the

pur-

SERM. purposes of religion, and regulating our mo-

V.  ral conduct with a respect to God. How can we either love or fear, hope in, or avoid being obnoxious to the justice of God, and how can we imitate it in our behaviour towards our fellow creatures, unless we know what it is, and by what rule it proceeds? We are sure that the supreme, righteous, and wise ruler of the world, will preserve inviolable that order which he has established; that he will constantly and uniformly act according to his approbation of moral goodness in his rational creatures, and his disapprobation of the contrary. Tho' he may not during their trial so remarkably interpose as a judge, in rewarding the virtuous and punishing the wicked; yet he has given all men sufficient reason to believe that it shall be so, some way, and at some time or other, and to many has declared expressly, that there is a time appointed in which *he will judge the world in righteousness*. All this being clearly and distinctly apprehended by us, the divine justice is a proper and a determinate object of our esteem, reverence and fear. It adds great force to the eternal laws which are given to men, written upon their hearts, to be the rule of their actions; and is of great use as a glorious pattern to all mankind whereby their

com-

common happiness would be most effectually secured. But if we do not know what the justice of God is; only have this confused general notion, that it is a high transcendent excellence of his nature which we cannot comprehend, nor understand how it will be manifested, and what measures in his final distribution to moral agents the supreme ruler will observe,—What influence can this have on our tempers or behaviour?

SERM.
V.

From what has been said, it plainly appears, that God is, and necessarily must be just, or that justice inseparably belongs to his character, and is an essential perfection of his nature. If it be included in goodness, as it seems to be, the same arguments which prove him to be good prove him also to be just. Indeed it cannot be supposed with any pretence of reason, that those two qualities are separable in any wise agent. If he is good, and disposed to promote the happiness of others as far as possibly he can, his understanding must be very defective not to know that the impartial distribution of justice is the most effectual means of securing the peace, and the happiness of societies. On the other hand, if he is thoroughly and universally righteous, he must be good; for without *goodness*, what is called *justice*, degenerates into tyranny.

SERM. tyranny. 'Tis true, there may be supposed

V. a difference between a *righteous* and a *good* man; but in that supposition the former is a very imperfect character, and therefore the distinction cannot take place in the Deity, whose attributes *moral*, as well as *natural*, are all absolutely perfect. But it was never supposed, or can be supposed, that a man can be good with any tolerable degree of understanding, without being at the same time righteous: The connexion is so apparent between righteousness and the most universal happiness of rational beings, which is the supreme object of goodness.

But if we should allow all the distinction between justice and goodness which can be allowed with any pretence of reason, still we have certain evidence that God is a just being. It must be acknowledg'd; otherwise all religion and virtue are no more than insignificant words: It must be acknowledg'd, I say, that there is a real and essential difference between right and wrong, or moral good and evil. The sense of this is so deeply engraven on our hearts, that it is impossible for us not to discern it; and not to esteem the intelligent being who acts according to that difference, and disapprove the contrary character. Is it then possible for us to doubt whether the most perfect

fect of all intelligent beings is just or unjust? SERM.

Whether he, who discerns all things, and all V.

their differences and relations, *sees* that *right* is preferable, and in itself more excellent than *wrong*, and will act accordingly? Is it possible for us, when any moral agent deviates from the rule of righteousness, not to impute it either to a defect of understanding or of power, or to some corrupt affection? But none of these causes of error can be imagin'd to affect the supreme Being, perfect in knowledge, infinite in power, and incapable of being misled by any temptation. He has no interest of his own to serve by iniquity; his authority is derived from no superior, nor is he accountable to any. Of whom can he be *afraid* that he should pervert judgment, or whom can he be studious to please, that he should be bias'd by partial affection, since all are equally his creatures and subject to his disposal? He has laid us under the strictest obligations to righteousness, how then can we imagine that he is unrighteous himself? To this purpose is the reasoning of *Elibu*, on the subject of divine justice, and it seems to have great force,---

** Who hath given him a charge over the earth, or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man; if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together,*

** Job xxxiv. 13, 14, 15, 17, 18.*

SERM. gether, and man shall turn again unto dust.

V. Shall even he that bateth right govern; and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? Is it fit to say to a King thou art wicked, and to Princes ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of Princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor, for they all are the work of his hands? I come in the

Second place, to shew more particularly, in what instances the divine justice is exercised. And here we must consider the true character of the Deity, which is that of the supreme moral governor of the world. Supposing the idea of justice in general to be settled, that it is rendering to all their due, the practice of it must be different, according to the different relations and conditions of the persons between whom it takes place. It requires a man to preserve inviolated the rights of another man over which he has no authority; to render a suitable recompence for services; to fulfil contracts, and to make restitution for wrongs. But the righteousness of a ruler consists in distributing to all subjects rewards and punishments, according to the known, at least sufficiently promulged laws of the society. And the righteousness of God, who can be considered in no other capacity than

than that of the supreme universal ruler of all S E R M.
moral agents, consists in rendering to them V.
according to their works, including their af-
fections, intentions, motives, and every cir-
cumstance necessary to a true estimate of their
moral rectitude or evil, which are all perfect-
ly known to him.

In the divine administration, which com-
prehends the whole extent of created exist-
ence and the entire series of events, there is
a visible relation between life and the course of
inanimate nature: The latter being so directed
as to answer the purposes of the other, by
impressions on its organs of perception, and
by exciting its active powers, so that there is
apparent oeconomy in the conduct of the ani-
mal state; and superintending providence by
the discipline of pleasure and pain arising
from sensible objects, determines living crea-
tures to pursue the ends for which they were
made. But in the government of moral agents,
whose life is capable of greater variety, as well
as superior kinds, of enjoyment, and of oppo-
site unhappiness; the like discipline being ap-
plied to higher purposes, that is, pleasure be-
ing connected with virtue, and pain with
moral evil, obtains the character of righteous.
Upon this view, we may consider as includ-
ed in the exercise of divine justice, all in-

SERM. V. stances in which, (whether by extraordinary interposition, or by the establishment of nature in its ordinary course,) providence testifies an approbation of moral rectitude, causing natural good to follow it, and disapprobation of vice and iniquity, by making pain of any kind the consequence of it. But these are so various that they cannot be enumerated. Not to mention *surprising events*, (which have been before observed to carry in the judgment of all men, (who own a superintending providence,) the visible marks of rewards and punishment,) there are undeniable tendencies and effects in the ordinary administration, and resulting from the present constitution of things, which favour virtue and discountenance wickedness. Who, that attentively considers the general condition of mankind in this world, can question the truth of Solomon's observation,—* *That length of days is in the right hand of wisdom, or religious virtue, and in her left hand are riches and honour.* Temperance, industry, and the social virtues, are naturally productive of health, reputation, and riches, which contribute to the long and easy enjoyment of life; whereas sickness, poverty, infamy, and sometimes untimely death, are the apparent effects of luxury, idleness, fraud, and violence. If there is an intelligent being

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* Prov. iii. 16.

at the head of nature, who guides all the motions and operations of inferior causes ; who framed the human constitution, and preserves its powers in their natural exercise ; who formed men into societies, induing them with social dispositions, and directing the exertion of them to their proper ends ; can it be doubted but he is a friend to virtue, and an adversary to moral evil ? Or that these are indications of *righteousness*, as the character of his government ? Again, if we look into the interior part of the human frame, and observe how its powers operate, considering it as the workmanship of God, we shall see yet clearer manifestations of his justice, in the stricter and more necessary connection which there is between virtue and pleasure, and between moral evil and pain. No sooner we are conscious of any good affection exerting itself, than a pleasing sensation arises in the self-approving mind, even before the compleated virtuous action, which increases the pleasure, because the good affection then has its full effect. On the other hand, inward shame, and self-tormenting reflections necessarily accompany a consciousness of immoral dispositions, and grow with them in every step of their progress, and all their bad effects. For proof of this, the proper appeal is to experience, and every

SERM. man's heart will witness to him that it is true,
 V. unless a long course of profligate wickedness
 has destroyed his natural sense of right and
 wrong; in which case human nature is visibly
 depraved and lost to all rational self-enjoy-
 ment. The ways therefore of *wisdom* are,
 by the unalterable appointment of God, *ways*
of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace:
 The contrary, are ways of sorrow and misery.
 And here is a farther instance of a just moral
 government in nature, or of the divine right-
 teousness, adding a sanction of rewards and
 punishments which executes itself, to the law
 which is written in the hearts of men.

But still it must be acknowledged, that
 tho' these are instances of the divine justice,
 and particular methods by which it is exerci-
 sed, yet it is not fully manifested in them.
 The observations which have been made on
 the common course of providence do not hold
 universally; the best men are not always the
 most prosperous in the world, tho' virtue tends
 to prosperity. Sickness, poverty, and reproach
 happen often to the good and to the bad pro-
 miscuously; nay sometimes true religion is the
 very cause of grievous suffering from the hands
 of wicked men. And even what may more
 properly be called the sanction of the law of
 nature, the inward satisfaction and peace
 which

which accompanies a consciousness of virtuous integrity as its reward, and the anguish which attends men's self-accusing thoughts as the present punishment of their sins, even this does not appear as one would expect the result of a judicial proceeding should do. It rises and falls, not always in exact proportion to merit and demerit; but men have it in their power to make it more or less sensibly felt. Sometimes good men thro' their own weakness and inattention, have not all the enjoyment of their own sincerity which they might have; and bad men, by increasing their wickedness, harden themselves into an insensibility, and lessen the feeling of their own sufferings for it. We must therefore conclude, that the present state of this world, tho', it is not without strong intimations of the divine justice, yet it is not the proper scene for that attribute to display itself fully in; and that God has appointed a future time wherein he will judge men, and all other moral agents, in righteousness, rendering to them all according to their works.

From what has been last observed, we have a satisfactory answer to the objections which are commonly made against the equity of the divine government. Some dispensations of providence carry at first view an appear-

SERM.ance of being favourable to the wickedness
 V. of men, and of severity against true piety and
 virtue. The covetous, and ambitious prosper
 in wicked devices for increasing their wealth
 and power by methods of deceit and cruelty;
 while the innocent are caught in their snares,
 and fall a prey to them: Sometimes the most
 eminently virtuous are the most barbarously
 used. The answer to all which is, that we
 ought not to make a judgment concerning
 the divine administration by single *unconnected*
 events; for it is an intire scheme comprehend-
 ing the whole series of events. And therefore,
 as in other obvious cases, a system is not rightly
 understood, nor a true judgment pronounced
 upon it merely by seeing and considering
 its unrelated parts, but by discerning their
 mutual relations; so to a right judgment of
 this moral scheme, it would be necessary to
 see the remotest issue of things comprehended
 in it, which being above the reach of human
 understanding, particular dispensations, (which
 are only parts of the great design,) must be but
 very imperfectly understood by us, and it
 would be extremely rash to pronounce them
 inconsistent with wisdom, equity, and good-
 ness. We know by experience, that some
 events which at first were shocking, and seem-
 ed to be very grievous, have afterwards ap-
 peared

peared in a quite different light, not only just, but wisely meant for good. We may well suppose it to be so in other cases, to the end of which our knowledge does not reach. But when the mystery of God shall be finished, when the great plan of his providence shall have its full accomplishment, then, and not till then, shall the divine moral attributes be perfectly vindicated, to the conviction of all rational beings; all difficulties relating to this subject cleared up, and the objections silenced which short-sighted mortals now make, but which really have no other foundation than in their own ignorance; at present the ways of God are to us *unsearchable, and his judgments past finding out.* This however we know, and it ought to satisfy us, that since there are plain discoveries of a ruling intelligence in the universe which formed and disposes all things in it; since the supreme Being is the natural governor of all his creatures, and the moral governor of all rational agents; since from the constitution of our own nature, and by convincing arguments drawn even from the present administration, it appears that he is on the side of virtue, and that he is just and good; since these things are so, his justice shall *finally*, and in the *whole*, be fully manifested for the good of his crea-

SERM. tion. Let us, next, suppose that mankind
 V. are now in a state of probation, (which is a
 supposition in all respects worthy of the wisdom of God, and not inconsistent with any of his perfections, and we have great reason to believe it is fact,) when we consider the weakness and imperfection of the human capacity, both intellectual and moral, and the surprising improvement it makes by due application and exercise, (which depends principally on the mind itself,) and when we consider the circumstances of our state exactly fitted to the design of trying us, and giving the opportunities of making progress in knowledge and virtue;—Allowing this supposition, I say, it is evident that the appearances of our present condition are just such as they ought, or as in reason they could be expected to be. That is, it was not reasonable to think that divine providence should interpose any otherwise than it now actually does, not by dispensing to all men enjoyment and happiness of all kinds, or pain and misery in exact proportion to the good and evil of their dispositions and behaviour, (for then their state would not be probationary;) but by affording them sufficient means of virtue, yet leaving them at liberty to use them or not, or giving strong intimations, but not an intuitive knowledge such as should

should necessitate their assent or attention, that SERM.
V.
God is a lover of moral rectitude in his creatures, and will support its interest. If it be so, and the principles before-mentioned be true, the consequence, I think, is very plain, that God will distribute rewards and punishments to every one of mankind; and the justice of his government requires him to do so.

This is all the length that our *unassisted* reason can carry us in the knowledge of a *future* divine retribution. In what manner, at what time, and with what solemnity God will *judge the world in righteousness*, must be unknown to us without a revelation: And so must the nature and circumstances of that state to which men shall be adjudged; any farther, than that it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked, or that in general, the former shall be happy, and the other unhappy. As the human mind is naturally capable of great variety in its condition, and of passing thro' (and we have reason to believe, nay certainly that it actually does pass thro') several stages of existence; during it's continuance in one stage, the knowledge it has of another is very imperfect. Some have imagined that the appearances of our present situation could not be accounted for any other way so well, as by the supposing a pre-existence

SERM. existence of our souls, and those appearances
 V. to be the consequences of their behaviour in
 that state. But this is only conjecture, the
 supposition appears to reason possible, and but
 barely so. We have a very familiar instance,
 known to every one, of an important change
 in the state of the mind, tho' it is only a gra-
 dual and progressive change, that is, from
 infancy to mature age. How different are
 the notions, the exercises, and enjoyments of
 a child, and a grown man? And how imper-
 fect are the views which the mind in its first
 mature condition, has of manly, that is, of
 rational and virtuous employments and plea-
 sures? Like this is the difference (and so St.
Paul very fitly makes the comparison *) be-
 tween the present and future state, with re-
 spect to the sentiments and improvements of
 the mind, tho' the essential powers are the
 same, and will remain for ever; and it is but
 a very imperfect notion we have *now*, of
 what we ourselves shall be *hereafter*. We
 think, and reason, and speak but like children
 concerning the affairs and entertainments of
 that vastly superior life to come, in compa-
 rison with which the present is only an in-
 fancy of being. This however, which is di-
 rectly to the present purpose, we must con-
 clude,

* 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

clude, and our idea of the divine justice necessarily leads us to it, that the condition of every particular person shall be according to his works or moral improvement in the probation-state, without excepting one individual, and without regard to any other consideration. And not only so in general, but the measure or degree of future happiness shall bear an exact proportion to the degree of virtue attained in this world; and the measure of punishment will bear an exact proportion to the degree of moral evil in the temper and practice of men here; and in other words, the last and decisive judgment of God, and every particular sentence pronounced by him, will be impartial and equitable. Both these characters are included in the very notion of justice, and must be understood to be meant when we attribute that perfection to the Deity. *Impartiality* is so essential to righteousness in judicature, that *respect of persons* is the very thing meant by corrupting or perverting judgment. And for *equity*, (consisting in the proportion of degrees determined by the sentence of a judge, between merit and rewards, and between guilt and punishment,) this is so far implied in the idea of justice, that every instance of deviation from it must be imputed to a defect of that quality, or else to a defect of

SERM.
V.

SERM. of wisdom or power. Now it is certain, that

V. with God there can be no partiality. For as all creatures originally derive their being from him, every capacity in their nature, and every good in their condition is his gift, there could be no regard to one more than another. And thro' all the periods of their duration nothing can be done by any of them, no use made of the powers he bestow'd on them, which can alter his dispositions and purposes towards them: None indeed which can please him except the improvement of those powers to the proper ends appointed by himself, that is, nothing which can mislead him from the rule of right or absolute impartiality, and no causes can be imagin'd which render the divine judicial proceedings unequal or deficient in the proportion of justice. For as he has no unequal partial affection towards his creatures, and there can be no suspicion of his departing from unbiass'd integrity, so it is impossible any the least circumstance which enters into the merit of moral actions, should be hid from his understanding; or that he should not exactly discern the precise degree of goodness or evil which is in them. And in the whole moral state of every individual agent it is equally absurd to suppose, that his adjudging and effectually applying a proportionable reward or pro-

proportionable degree of punishment, should S E R M.
be hindered thro' his own impotence, or by V.
the resistance of any opposite power.

As I have taken notice before, that the doctrine of the scriptures concerning the divine moral attributes is perfectly agreeable to the dictates of reason, we may make the same observation here. The declarations of the sacred writings, importing that God is no respecter of persons, are so many and so express; they are delivered with such clearness, and inculcated with such earnestness; it is so much insisted on as a foundation never to be departed from in our judging the divine proceedings, and in forming our expectations from his supreme tribunal, that no Christian can have any doubt concerning this truth, or the least reason to imagine that his own, and every other person's final condition, will not be determin'd according to it. The righteous judge of the world will have no consideration in judgment of any man's person or outward state and character; of his nation, family, or religious profession; whether he were beautiful or deform'd, noble or ignoble, rich or poor, learned or unlearned; whether he were *Jew*, or *Gentile*, profess'd *Christian*, *Mahometan*, or *Pagan*; but *he that feared him and wrought righteousness in his state of trial, shall be accepted*

SERM. *cepted with him.* He that did his will *sincerely*

V. *ly*, according to the knowledge he had of it, or might have had by a due improvement of the opportunities afforded him, shall be approved. He that occupied faithfully and diligently the talents committed to his trust whether they were more or fewer, shall be proportionably rewarded; but all the workers of iniquity, of whatever denomination they were, shall be finally rejected. Again, the scripture as constantly teaches, that not only rewards and punishments shall be impartially distributed in the future state, as men were good or bad, but that their condition of happiness and misery in the other world, will be in exact proportion to the degree of their sincerity, zeal, and diligence in well doing here, and to the measure of their sinfulness. There shall be a difference between the reward of a prophet and a righteous man; and he that sincerely does the very lowest offices of charity to good men, shall not lose his reward; and he that *soweth sparingly*, in works of virtue and charity, *shall reap sparingly*; but *he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully* *. In proportion to the improvement which every one takes of his talents, so shall his recompence be. As the celestial bodies shine with an unequal splendor, for *one star*

* 2 Cor. ix. 6.

star differs from another in glory, so also is the SERM.
resurrection of the dead *. On the other hand, V.

the punishment of sinners shall be unequal; that degree of unhappiness, and no more, being allotted to every one which bears an exact proportion to their offences. *That † servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* Here, indeed, there is a difference between the justice and goodness of God, not with respect to the principal and the ultimate end, but the manner of exercise and manifestation. He communicates good very liberally to his creatures, but unequally. His manifold wisdom, and manifold bounty are manifested in the variety of his gifts, which he bestows with sovereign freedom. Who can pretend to call him to account for the unequal distribution of that whereof he is, and can only be considered as the absolute Lord and Proprietor? There is no pretence of injustice, but a great discovery of wisdom, power, and goodness, in his creating various kinds of beings, with different degrees of

* 2 Cor. xv. 41, 42.

† Luke xii. 44, 48.

SERM. of perfection, and capacity of happiness:

V. And parallel to that is his making distinctions among individuals of the same kind, (suppose men,) by giving to some greater, and to others lesser abilities of various sorts, which are the foundation of unequal happiness. So he distinguishes men by the gifts of nature, the outward favours of providence, and religious privileges: So he made a difference between the posterity of *Jacob* and *Esau*, calling the former to the privileges of his peculiar people, from which the other were excluded. But the exercise of divine justice is directed by another rule; its allotments of natural good and evil always bear a proportion to the moral quality of the dispositions and works of men, exactly estimated by infinite wisdom; and renders to them according to what is properly their own, whether it be good or evil. To represent God as acting arbitrarily in his government of mankind, using such power as the *potter does over the clay*, making one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour, merely because he will; that is, using *such power* in awarding, or in appointing and determining to award to them final happiness and misery, this is to destroy the true notion of his justice, in effect to deny it, and thereby to weaken the security of religious virtue.

Let

Let us now consider what is the proper application to be made of this important principle both of natural and revealed religion. SERM. V.

First, as the final issues of the divine judgment are of all events the most momentous to us, (for it ascertains our greatest happiness or misery, so as no power can prevent it, no wisdom can provide against it,) this doctrine teaching us by what rule that judgment will proceed, and what measures will be observed in it, at the same time teaches us how to form our expectations from it. Men are naturally anxious about their condition hereafter; nothing can afford greater contentment to their minds at present, than the well grounded hope of future happiness; but how is that to be attained? Our state is to be determined by the sentence of a righteous judge, according as our works are good or bad. And therefore it must be the greatest vanity, and the highest presumption, for men to expect happiness hereafter, whose hearts accuse them of wickedness deliberately committed and obstinately continued in. Surely the state of that creature must be very desperate, and very deplorable, whose hope depends on the Almighty's *pervverting* judgment in its favour. But men deceive themselves by fondly imagining that something *else* will be accepted instead of in-

SERM. integrity of heart and purity of hands; that an
 V. external denomination, a religious profession,
 a partial obedience, or a purpose of future
 amendment, will recommend them to the fa-
 vour of God, which is really to suppose that
 he is not a righteous judge.

On the other hand, the man whose heart
 does not condemn him has confidence to-
 wards God, because he is a perfectly just go-
 vernor, by whom no service sincerely per-
 formed to him, nor instance of respect to his
 commandments, will ever be forgotten. Un-
 less this were known to be the character of the
 judge, and that the measures of righteousness
 will be observed by him in judgment, no man
 could have any rational confidence. He might
 take his chance in a capricious administration;
 but the only foundation of reasonable hope is,
 that distribution will be made with impartial
 equity. It is certainly becoming frail creatures,
 and whose hearts accuse them of many moral
 defects, to stand in awe of the divine justice;
 and, as St. *Peter* exhorts, *to pass the time of*
their sojourning in fear, if they call on the fa-
ther who without respect of persons judgeth all
men *. But still a self-approving mind is na-
 turally secure, supported by this persuasion,
 that right shall finally prevail in the universe;
 and therefore looks forward, without conster-
 nation,

* Eph. i. 17.

nation, to the last result of things, when all irregularities shall be rectified, when the proud shall be no more prosperous, nor innocence oppressed, but all men shall receive according to their deeds done in the body, and not according to their outward actions only but the prevalent affections and purposes of their hearts; for * *every secret thing shall be brought into judgment, whether it be good or bad.*

Secondly, The consideration of God's justice to be finally manifested in appointing the condition of all men according to their works, should teach us patience under the difficulties of our present state. Though the ways of providence are now involved in obscurity which is impenetrable to human knowledge, and in our broken view of its all-wise proceedings some events have an appearance quite contrary to righteousness, the last judgment will set all these seeming inequalities right. And to them who endure persecution for conscience sake, this is a great support of patience, that it is, as St. Paul speaks *, *a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those who trouble them; and to them who are troubled a final happy rest, when he shall be glorified in the salvation of his saints, and take vengeance on them who knew him not, nor obeyed his laws.* It is often grievous to good men, that their characters,

O 2

* Eccl. xii. 14.

† 2 Thes. i. 6.

SERM. ters, (which may be numbered among their
 V. most important interests in this world,) suffer
 by wrong human judgment, both in the forms
 of public authority and private censure. But
 there lies an appeal to a superior righteous tri-
 bunal; and with minds supported by a consci-
 ousness of their own sincerity, it may well be
 accounted a very small thing * *to be judged by*
men, seeing he that finally judgeth is the su-
 preme, infallible, and just Lord. This con-
 sideration however, should prevent the rash
 judgments of men; should make them cau-
 tious in their proceedings even where they have
 a right to judge; and restrain the liberties they
 too often take of reproaching their neighbours;
 especially of judging the motives and inten-
 tions of their hearts, which is God's preroga-
 tive, for he only † *will bring to light the hid-*
den things of darkness, and make manifest the
counsels of the heart, that every one may have
that praise and recompence which is justly due
 to him.

Thirdly, God in his justice, as well as his
 other moral perfections, is the best example
 for us to imitate, as far as the frailty of our
 nature will allow. It is our glory as reasona-
 ble creatures to be capable of imitating him;
 and as our consciences bear as full testimony
 to the rectitude of this as to any other part of
 his

* 1 Cor. iv. 3.

† 1 Cor. iv. 5.

his law written in our hearts, we must be self-SERM.
condemned, and therefore unhappy, in acting V.
contrary to it. It is true, our fellow-creatures
have demands of right upon us which no other
beings can have upon the almighty maker of
all things; and therefore our satisfying those
demands, is a doing justice which cannot
properly be called an imitation of him. But
since there is an apparent equity resulting from
the relations of persons and things, to which
the supreme Ruler has a regard in his admin-
istration. This is a strong motive to our go-
verning our conduct by a regard to the same
equity, even where our condition being essen-
tially different, our acts of justice are no way
parallel to his. And especially, the exercise
of human authority should, as exactly as
possible, follow the pattern of that perfect
righteousness which governs the world. Prin-
ces are called Gods upon earth, their power
duly exercised being the nearest resemblance
of the divine universal dominion. But if their
power degenerates into tyranny, if under the
colour of authority they oppress their fellow-
creatures, they are then guilty, not only of
the greatest injustice to men, but the highest
dishonour to God the fountain of all lawful
authority, * *by whom kings reign righteously
and princes decree justice*, and to whom human

O 3

usur-

* Prov. viii. 15.

S E R M. usurpations, the perverting of judgment, and
 V. violence, are no otherwise to be attributed,
 than the most malicious acts of the wicked-
 est beings, the devils themselves: that is, they
 are permitted by his providence for the trial
 of men's virtues, or for the punishment of
 their transgressions. Since he who is the
 absolute sovereign of the whole world, ac-
 countable to none, never acts arbitrarily in the
 government of his creatures, but always with
 perfect equity, how dare ambitious mortals,
 (who * *shall die like men, and fall like the ty-
 rannical princes* which have gone before them,)
 enslave and oppress their fellow-mortals, who
 in the main privileges of human nature are
 equal with them, and shall stand upon a le-
 vel with them before the supreme tribunal?
 Shall they govern by arbitrary will, or by ca-
 price and passion, instead of justice? Surely
 such encroachments on the rights of huma-
 nity, which are under his protection, and
 such indignity to his own government, cries
 aloud to the righteous God for vengeance;
 and to resist its destructive exorbitances by
 reason, and force under the conduct of rea-
 son, is not only justified but laudable, nay
 strictly required by the principle of piety to-
 wards God, as well as benevolence to mankind.

I

* Psal. lxxxii. 7.

I have now finished my intended explanation of the divine moral attributes. They might, indeed, have been considered much more largely, and distinguished into a greater variety. Mercy, and grace, and patience are sometimes represented, (and very usefully,) to practical purposes, as distinct perfections of the Deity. But if we consider them as properties of the divine nature, analogous to the different springs of moral action in the human mind, (which is the only way we have of forming our most accurate notions concerning them,) it is plain those last mentioned, are really the same, diversified only by the manner of exercise or manifestation, and by the condition of the objects. The *grace* of God is, his *favour* to the undeserving, to reasonable creatures who were obnoxious to his displeasure by their offences; or favour manifested beyond what they could have had any assurance of according to the original discovery of his will, and terms of their acceptance. To his *goodness* they owe their being, the continuance of it, and whatever happiness they possess or hope for. But as their reason must teach them to expect future blessings from him upon the condition of sincere and persevering obedience to the law of their nature, a sense of guilt shakes the foundations of their confidence.

SERM. fidence. In this case favour continued or offered, is *grace*; for that supposes the object to be both sinful and miserable to such a degree as greatly to magnify the compassion which interposes for its relief. And the *patience* of God, is the lenity of his government manifested in his suspending the execution of judgment, that sinners may have the opportunity of repentance, thereby to prevent their destruction. But in all this variety of operation, the principle is the same, *divine benevolence*; which shines the more gloriously (because it appears most pure and disinterested) in the miseries and distresses, the guilt and obstinacy, of the creatures towards whom it is exercised.

In like manner the *truth of God* in the moral sense, (comprehending veracity or sincerity in his communication with other intelligent beings so as not to deceive them, and fidelity in fulfilling his promises,) this does not appear strictly speaking to be a distinct attribute. Indeed as veracity is to the human mind a beautiful moral object, (we cannot but approve it, and disapprove the contrary as odious and deformed,) it is very natural to ascribe it to the Deity as a branch of his perfect moral character; which is not to be understood in this sense, that in all the knowledge

ledge we derive from him, (and it is all the knowledge we have,) things are still represented as they really are in themselves, and as he sees them. The contrary is evident. The ideas we have by our external senses, (of which God is the original author,) are not complete representations of the nature of material objects; nor do our faculties seem to be fitted for comprehending the essences of any beings; and consequently, the knowledge which God communicates does not reach so far. But it is obvious, that *sincerity* does not require any person to make known to others all the truth which he himself knows; (it were impossible that an infinitely intelligent being should do it;) but only to discover the truth which they have a right to know in pursuance of their mutual relation, or to prevent their falling into errors which may be hurtful to them. Now God can be under no previous obligation to his creatures. All the good they possess, and the farther good they hope for, proceeds solely from his bounty; and therefore their reasonable expectations that he will not mislead them to their hurt, or so as to frustrate the design of his own beneficence, however just these expectations be, (and indeed they are more just and certain than those which are founded on the demands of strictest right from their fellow-

SERM. fellow-creatures,) yet they really have no

V. other foundation than this, that his favour
will be manifested to such beings consistently
and uniformly, in carrying on his original
kind intentions concerning them: In other
words, the truth of God is nothing else but
his goodness exercised towards intelligent be-
ings of imperfect understandings, in a way
suitable to their nature and condition. After
the same manner must be understood that
other branch of his truth, *faithfulness*; which
really means no more than the immutability
of his goodness, or else it may be considered
as included in justice. So fidelity is com-
monly understood as included in the righte-
ousness of men; and according to either of
these views, it is comprehended in the di-
vine attributes already explained.

S E R M O N VI.

The Divine Perfections incomprehensible.

Job xi. 17.

Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to Perfection?

OF all objects to which the human SERM.
 mind can engage its attention, the VI.
 Deity, his being and attributes, just-
 ly claims the first place; there is no other
 so excellent, none so important to the high-
 est purposes of our existence and our happi-
 ness. We cannot avoid observing, that of
 things which occur to our thoughts, the idea
 of superior excellence accompanies some upon
 a comparison with others. As the external
 senses distinguish between pleasant and unplea-
 sant in their objects, and the internal sense
 perceives a difference between the beautiful
 and deformed, so the understanding not only
 separates truth from falsehood, but discerns a
 dignity in some beings and some qualities be-
 yond

SERM. yond others. It is not possible for a man to

VI. consider inanimate nature and life, the brutal
and the rational powers, or virtue and vice,
with a perfect indifference, or without pre-
ferring one before the other in his esteem;
and the idea of a difference in the degrees
of their perfection as necessarily arises in his
mind, as that of a difference in their being.
The objects or properties to which we natu-
rally attribute excellence, have been just now
hinted; they are intelligence, active power,
and moral rectitude. The being to which these
characters belong, is preferred to another sup-
posed to be without them; and as they ad-
mit of various degrees, our esteem rises in pro-
portion to the measure in which we conceive
any being to be indued with them. Now
these are characters of the divine nature in the
highest perfection. God is not only intelligent,
active, holy and good, but he is infinitely so;
and he is the original cause of all the affec-
tions, whereby these characters are formed
in any degree, or may be attained, in every
other being. Besides, we distinguish the ob-
jects of our knowledge and attention, by the
relation they have to our selves, and their con-
nexion with our happiness. However enter-
taining speculation may be to some minds,
every one must acknowledge, that those things
are

are the most worthy of our inquiry, and our SERM.
rational powers are the most properly employ- VI.
ed about them, which nearly affect our own
interest; and we cannot be ignorant of or un-
attentive to them without great disadvantage
and danger to our highest enjoyment. But if
the doctrine concerning God and his perfec-
tions be true,—if there is such a being, omni-
potent, perfectly wise, our maker, preserver,
and supreme Lord,—if we have to do with
him in so many ways, and there arises such a
variety of obligations to him running thro' the
whole compass of our being and its affairs, in
order to attain its true ends and our greatest
happiness, nothing can be more manifest,
than, that this claims our regard preferably
to all other subjects which we can turn our
thoughts to; and for these reasons it is most
justly recommended to our most serious and
affectionate meditation.

But there is an objection, or a prejudice,
against the truth of this first and fundamen-
tal principle of religion, (at least against our
allowing it that room which is pleaded for in
our careful inquiry and consideration,) taken
from the difficulty, indeed incomprehensibil-
ness of it. The object, 'tis alleged, is too
big for our faculties; our minds lose them-
selves in the contemplation of it, and, instead
of

SERM. of having clear ideas and certain knowledge,
VI. are involved in the utmost obscurity and confusion. How can we affirm any thing to be true which we do not comprehend, or as some affect to speak, not at all understand? Human reason is so unequal to the comprehension of the Deity, or even forming any right judgment concerning him, that where by strong prepossession the belief of his existence has obtained, men's notions of his nature and attributes have been monstrously absurd, destructive of all religion and virtue, which is the professed practical use and improvement of that belief. This was evidently the case of the heathen world; but some of the more inquisitive utterly denied the principle itself as unintelligible. Is it not wisdom then to employ our intellectual powers in inquiries more level to their capacity, rather than embarrass them in perplexing intricacies, by aspiring to the knowledge of abstruse points quite out of our depth, and perhaps deceive ourselves into a conceit of knowing what we really do not know, that is, have no distinct ideas of; the consequence of which may be disturbing fears and scruples, with other unhappy effects of superstition? To set this matter in a clear light, and remove the objection or prejudice which has been mentioned against men's believing

believing or attending to the foundations of religion, I will, first, consider how far and in what sense the divine nature and perfections surpass our understanding. And, Secondly, offer some considerations to show, that their incomprehensibleness is no just reason against our believing and attending to them, so as to influence our affections and direct our practice.

SERM.

VI.

First, Let us consider how far, and in what sense the divine nature and perfections surpass our understanding. The meaning is not, that we can have no idea at all of the supreme absolutely perfect and independent being; such an assertion as that differs nothing from atheism. It is impossible we should believe the existence of any thing whereof we can have no idea, or, which amounts to the same thing, we are not to imagine there are contradictions in the notion of a Deity, which we are notwithstanding to admit or our inquiries into them must be silenced, under the pretence of his being incomprehensible. For a notion which includes a real contradiction in it, is indeed a notion of nothing at all; which however men may give it a name, yet it is without any signification of truth, which the human understanding, upon examining it, can possibly give an assent to. But this is far from being the real case with respect to the

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SERM. important subject of our present consideration.

VI. For surely no creature that has the idea of perfection, and is capable of abstract thinking, can be incapable of forming the idea of absolute perfection, or of an absolutely perfect Being, which is what we mean by the Deity. What is there in it shocking to human understanding? What, indeed, that the weakest of men, if he attends, cannot easily perceive, or that the severest inquirer can possibly apprehend to be inconsistent? It is certain, some very confused notions, nay gross absurdities, have been put into the definition of God, and received by the unthinking generality of mankind in many successive generations. But it may be safely submitted to the unprejudiced reason of every man, whether the idea of a being absolutely perfect, and altogether free from any thing which can be truly called an imperfection, be not as natural and intelligible, and as far from the least appearance of contradiction, as the idea of a being whose powers and perfection are limited, which we are sure actually exists, for we are conscious that it is our own condition. Indeed, the idea of absolute perfection seems to be original in our minds, and prior to that of any lower measures. It is the standard to which we, at least tacitly, refer, when we estimate the various degrees

degrees of perfection and imperfection in inferior beings. I do not mean the particular and relative perfections of individuals, belonging to the several species, (every one of which has its own standard,) but there is a gradation of the kinds themselves, the inanimate, the vegetable, the sensitive, and the rational, one still rising above another in the scale of being; and our thoughts naturally ascend to, or rather seem to have pre-conceived absolute perfection at the top of all, by comparison with which, and in gradual abatement of it, we judge other things to have their different measures of perfection and imperfection.

But, when we say God is incomprehensible, the meaning is, that though we have a clear and distinct idea of an absolutely perfect being, so far that there appears no contradiction in it, and we have a satisfying proof of his existence, yet we do not fully understand his nature and the extent of his perfections. Experience has taught us to make a difference between discerning the existence and some properties of things, so as to apply them to use, and comprehending their natures. One instance of this is in the curious productions of human art; the external appearances and effects of which are seen by the most ignorant person, and perhaps fill him

SERM. with amazement: But the inward composition,

VI. the situation, and movements of the parts, the causes of those appearances, and the essence of the work, are intirely unknown to him. Another instance, common to all mankind, is in our knowledge of nature. Our senses perceive the exterior face of corporeal beings; our reason and observation enable us to understand many of their properties, and relations, and uses. But there is an internal constitution upon which those properties, and relations, and uses depend, which no human understanding is able by searching to find out. The most learned philosopher, any more than the unskilful vulgar, cannot penetrate into the secret nature and causes of the life, the sensation, and self-moving power of animals, the growth, the various beauty, and fruitfulness of plants; nay, nor into the essence of the plainest inanimate body, or into the causes of its cohesion, and its gravity. In like manner, we may easily apprehend the difference between understanding *that which may be known of God*, because he has manifested it to us, his existence, and his perfections, discovered by their effects, in the creation, preservation, and government of the world; between this, I say, and comprehending his essence, his eternity, immensity, and the infinity

nity of his power, knowledge and other at-tributes. SERM.
VI.

I propos'd, in the next place, to shew, that the incomprehensibleness of the divine nature and perfections, is no just reason against our believing and attending to them, so as to influence our affections, and direct our practice. And one important consideration to this purpose has been already insinuated; namely, that we do not comprehend the essences, nor consequently all the properties of other beings, concerning the existence of which and some of their properties, powers, and uses we can have no doubt; and which we regard as real, and, in various degrees, important to the ends of life. If our faculties do not enable us to know the intimate nature of any thing, not even of the meanest insect, or of the most contemptible pebble, how can we pretend by searching to find out the original cause of all things, and understand the Almighty to perfection? And if we cannot comprehend the essences of those beings which we are best acquainted with, and whose existence is matter of the utmost certainty, (which is really the case of the human understanding with respect to man himself; for we are conscious that we do exist, that we perceive, remember, desire, will, and be-

SERM. in motion, but what the nature of that perceiving, active, self-conscious thing in us is, we do not know;) if it be so, how can we comprehend God our maker?

VI.

There are certain bounds set to our knowledge beyond which it cannot pass. As it is derived from a superior intelligent cause, the capacity and means of attaining it, are limited to the particular purposes for which he has appointed them. Of this we may be convinced by attending to our own ideas, and the manner in which they are excited: They reach no farther than the sensible qualities of objects without us, and the transient perceptions and acts of our own minds. Of the external objects themselves we have no other notion but this confused general one, that they are something, we do not know what, called substances, and supposed to be the subject of the qualities we perceive, or which have the power of exciting sensations in us: And of the mind itself, (by reflecting on which we have ideas of another kind,) our notion is, that it is a different being or substance, as little understood as bodies are, which is the subject of the perceptions, and has the power of producing the actions, which we are conscious of. Thus, the real intimate nature of beings, material and immaterial, is alike unknown

unknown to us. The wise author of our S E R M.
intellectual powers has formed them to an- VI.

swer the ends to which our constitution is adapted. He has given us such a knowledge of corporeal beings as may render them useful to us in life, and he has given such a capacity of knowing himself, and of knowing ourselves, as may direct us to act the part assigned to us in the creation, and attain our proper perfection and happiness. But our understandings are not fitted, at least in the present state, for a full and thorough comprehension of any thing, not even the least of God's works, far less of God himself. By men's not considering duly these narrow limits within which their intellectual acquirements are confined, and not being contented with them, but aspiring to a comprehension of the essences and causes of things, they have betrayed themselves into errors, the more difficult to be removed, because they put on the appearance of sublime knowledge. 'Tis this which has produced such confusion and absurdity in some of the natural sciences, or rather the systems which have passed under that name. Some high pretenders to learning, not satisfied with observing the plain appearances of the objects of their inquiry, and those obvious properties of which they had clear and distinct perceptions, and from thence

SERM. taking their rise to investigate their various
 VI. relations and effects, (in which method they
 might have proceeded safely, and others have
 proceeded successfully, to very useful and en-
 tertaining discoveries;) they fondly imagined
 that they were able to penetrate into hidden
 essences; and so going out of their depth in
 that misguided search, they bewildered them-
 selves, and misled others, bringing forth un-
 intelligent jargon instead of science, and a
 heap of words without meaning. I mention
 this only to shew, that if the human under-
 standing is so baffled in its attempts to explain
 the nature of created beings, (the existence and
 the uses of which are more familiar to us, and
 level to our capacity,) we need not think it
 strange that the knowledge of the uncreated
 essence and perfections is too high for us, nor
 should on that account be discouraged in our
 diligent, but modest inquiries into that which
 may be known of the supreme Being. And
 as thus it appears that in a multitude of in-
 stances, (indeed the whole extent of being,)
 our knowledge is but partial; we understand a
 little, a great deal is hid from us,—This should
 teach us, being humbly contented with the
 appointed imperfection of our minds, to em-
 ploy them within their proper sphere; not in
 curious disquisitions above their reach, but in
 com-

comparing and reasoning upon the clear and distinct ideas we have, in order to improve them to their true end in practice ; and not to argue against the existence and importance of things, merely because we cannot comprehend their essences and all their attributes. So,

Secondly, There are peculiar reasons why the Deity should be acknowledged to be by us unsearchable, and his attributes to surpass our comprehension. When men insist on this pretence against believing, or applying their minds to the study of any principle, that it is dark, incomprehensible, unintelligible, the meaning may be, that there is some ground to suspect a design to impose upon them ; perhaps it is imagined that the religionists artfully represent the objects of their belief as abstruse and mysterious in their nature, on purpose to make them venerable, which to inquisitive and conscious minds is rather a prejudice against them. To be satisfied concerning this, the best way we can take is to look into the inseparable characters of the subjects themselves. If they obviously appear too high for our understanding, there is then no cause of suspicion ; and if difficulty necessarily attends our conceptions of such sublime subjects, that is no objection at all either against their

SERM. reality or importance, nor consequently
 VI. against our inquiring into, and believing that
 which may be known concerning them. Now, there are certain characters of the Deity and all his perfections, inseparably belonging to his condition of being the original cause of all things, our ideas of which must be necessarily inadequate, such as eternity, immensity, and self-existence, and infinity which is the character of all his attributes; but at the same time these characters force themselves upon our minds, so that we cannot possibly avoid them; or they are rendered intelligible by an analogy to other cases which are more familiar to us, as will appear by reflecting but very briefly on what has been already said concerning them.

First, Eternity and immensity are essential attributes of the supreme Being, incomprehensible by the human understanding. Whenever we attempt to comprehend them we find ourselves involved in insuperable difficulties. How can we conceive an eternal duration now actually past? How can we form an idea of being no where included, no where excluded? And when men have reasoned upon these points, and endeavoured to explain them, their notions have been full of confusion and absurdity. Eternity has been represented as a
standing

standing now or permanent instant, co-existing with all parts of duration, because we cannot conceive succession without a beginning, nor infinity unequal and capable of addition or diminution. And immensity has been imagined as an *indivisible point*, co-extended with infinite space. It is not to be wondered at that our conceptions of both these subjects are so imperfect, if we consider how we come by them. The idea of duration arises from observing a succession in our own thoughts; it is enlarged by attending to the regular motion of some bodies: But imagination carries it beyond the limits of our own existence, or any knowledge we have of actual motion, still with an apprehended possibility of a farther addition; so that by this means our notion of eternity is only negative, that it is a duration undeterminable, or to which no bounds can be set. In like manner having by our senses the idea of corporeal distances, the fancy extends it beyond the utmost limits of material existence, till it runs us up to a negative infinity of space, that is, to which there may be an addition without end. So inadequate are our ideas of eternity and immensity! And therefore we reason upon them in the dark; and when we form hypotheses to explain them, from which we draw inferences, we presently
run

SERM.
VI.

SERM. run into contradictions, which only shew the
VI. weakness of our understandings. But surely
this is no argument against the divine eternity and omnipresence, or any pretence for neglecting them as unintelligible. For no scheme, not even atheism, can deliver us from the difficulty. Still we must believe something has existed from eternity; or if we should abstract from any particular being, nay from all being as actually existing, the idea of eternal duration will remain in our minds; and the train of our own thoughts will as naturally run us up to infinity of space, if we should imagine it to be only an infinite void unpossess'd by any being. And therefore the incomprehensibleness of these divine perfections is no just objection against their reality or importance as articles of our faith.

Secondly, Another character of the divine Being, imported in, or necessarily inferred from those just now mentioned, is self-existence, the most obvious notion of which is, that he is unoriginated, and derives his being from no other. And though that be only negative, yet our reason convinces us that it includes a positive, most perfect, and peculiar manner of existence, of which no appearances in ourselves, or in the world about us, can furnish us with any idea. By reflecting on the limited

mitted nature, duration, extent and power of SERM.
the being we are conscious of, and of other VI.
things which we discern, our thoughts are naturally led to a commencement of our and their existence, and consequently, to a cause of it upon which it absolutely depends. From whence it plainly follows, that such things might not have been, and that they may cease to be, or that their manner and condition of being is derived and contingent, essentially different from necessary self-existence. Now as consciousness, and the observation of things without us by their sensible properties and effects, are the fountains of all our knowledge, how is it possible that they, conveying only the notices of things which have all of them the characters of derivation and dependence, should give us any idea of a manner or condition of being entirely different, that is, unoriginated, uncaused, self-sufficient, and independent? But that something has existed from eternity, and therefore necessarily and independently on any other cause, is what all men must agree in acknowledging, and they do acknowledge it. Consequently, upon all suppositions our minds must be alike embarrassed with this idea; and the incomprehensible self-existence of the Deity cannot reasonably be urged against our belief of his being, or
the

SERM. the improvement of that belief to practical
VI. purposes.

Thirdly, If we consider the attributes of God which are exercised in his works, and whereof we find some imperfect image in ourselves and other inferior beings, (though they are much more clearly understood than those already mentioned, eternity, immensity, and self-existence, which are the characters of his being; yet) in some respects the same judgment is to be made of them, namely, that they are incomprehensible. Power is the first of this kind that occurs to our thoughts: We are naturally led to it by the consideration of visible appearances in the world which must be attributed to a cause. We find also an activity in ourselves, whereby we are able, not only to produce some effects within our minds, but also to move the members of our own bodies, and by them some other bodies. But by none of these methods can we form an adequate notion of infinite power, that is, which reaches to the utmost extent of possibility, or whatever does not imply a contradiction in itself, or an imperfection in the agent, which is what we mean by the divine omnipotence. We know that the active principle in our own nature is limited, but that in the perfection of being it transcends all its effects, not communicating

communicating an activity, which is its excellence, equal to its own, nor being exhausted by its operations. For whatever we have done, the power remains, and we can do more; but many things we cannot do, which may be, and are effected by superior agents. And when we contemplate the variety of beings in heaven and earth, some of them vastly great, which are all the works of God, they give us a very magnificent idea of his power; which is heightened by reasoning, as we always do on the subject of power, that it exceeds the effects, and is still capable of producing more. And if the effects themselves transcend our knowledge, as they evidently do, how can we comprehend the power of the cause? This is excellently represented by *Job* in these words;

Dead things are formed from under the earth, and the inhabitants thereof. (Vast creatures, of gigantick bulk, are fashioned in the dark recesses of the terraqueous globe.) Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick cloud, and the cloud is not rent under them. He holdeth back the face of his throne (or of heaven) and spreadeth his cloud upon it. He hath compassed the water with bounds until the day and night

SERM.
VI.

SERM. *might come to an end. The pillars of heaven*

VI. *tremble and are astonished at his reproof; he divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding smiteth through the proud. (The mountains, which seem to be the pillars and supporters of heaven, shake by his lightening and thunder; and he raiseth such tempests as divide the waters of the sea, making deep furrows in it, yet he knows how to depress its proud waves, reducing them to a dead calm.) By his spirit he hath garnish'd the heaven, his hand hath formed the crooked serpent. (He hath adorned the heavens with the stars which make the milky way, and other beautiful constellations with all their admirable windings.) Lo these are part of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him, the thunder of his power who can understand? But the power of God, as high as it is above our understandings, and incomprehensible by them, does not for that reason appear so shocking as to give any occasion for doubting its reality, or any pretence for not making it the object of our careful and affectionate attention. Shall we be so vain as to imagine that there is not, nor can be, any power greater than our own, or even than we can comprehend? By instances which continually occur to us, we know there is a great diversity of operation in nature, and of opera-*

operating power ; and that the perceptions we have of operations and powers of one kind, can give us no idea of operations and powers of another kind. For example, the operations of material causes has no manner of affinity with the activity of our minds. Does the clearest apprehension of the force of weights and springs give us any notion of sentiments arising, and dispositions exerting themselves in a spirit, and its giving a new determination to the exercise of its own faculties, and raising a new motion in bodies ? Supposing an intelligent being to have no idea of any powers but those of mechanism, (which is not an impossible supposition, for there does not appear to us any such connexion between the ideas of passive perception and mental activity, but that they may be separated) but supposing this, would not spontaneous action be perfectly incomprehensible to such an intelligent being ? Yet we know that it exists. Why then should a power different from, and superior to any we are conscious of, or can have the adequate idea of by the ordinary operations of nature, be imagined an absurdity, or be disregarded under the pretence of its being unintelligible, when we have convincing proof of its existence.

Again ;

SERM. Again; The knowledge of God surpasses
VI. our comprehension, as well as his power, extending to all things knowable, as the other does to all things possible. I have already had occasion, more than once, of observing the narrowness and weakness of the human mind, which by its faculties and ways of perceiving, at least in the present state, is not fitted for great proficiency in speculative knowledge; but only is furnished, by the means of sensation and reflection, with such perceptions as may answer the end of directing its practice in order to the attaining such happiness as it is capable of. It is no wonder then, that the knowledge of the most comprehensive views which the great maker of all things has of his own works, and all the powers, (with all the possible exertions of them,) which he has communicated to any of those his creatures, that, I say, the knowledge of this should be too high for us to understand, and that we cannot find it out to perfection. He must know the inmost essences of things, for he has made them: He must know the utmost effects of nature, and the utmost activity and operation of all inferior beings, for they all necessarily depend upon him. This meditation is very rationally, as well as devoutly, pursued by the Psalmist, particularly in the instance of
of

of God's knowing the hearts, the thoughts, S E R M.
the words, and actions of men; and the same VI.
reflections made upon it which I now propose.

He insists on God's having contrived, ordered and brought to perfection, the whole frame of our nature, * *Thou hast possessed my reins; thou hast covered me in my mother's womb; my substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance yet being imperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.* This is an argument to prove what he before asserted, in a solemn acknowledgment to God, † *O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me; thou knowest my down-fitting and my up-rising; thou understandest my thoughts afar off; thou compassest my path and my lying down, thou art acquainted with all my ways; for there is not a word in my tongue, but lo! O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me before and behind, and laid thine hand upon me.* Which words import a plain acknowledgment of this as a most certain truth, that God sees not only all the outward actions of men, but even the most secret thoughts and purposes of their

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hearts,

* Psal. cxxxix. from ver. 13 to 17. † Psal. cxxxix.
ver. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

SERM. hearts, nay, that he has a prescience of them.

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What finite mind can form a distinct idea of this infinite knowledge, particularly the instance last mentioned, the seeing of men's hearts, and their most secret thoughts, and even a prescience of their future free actions? How to understand it, and reconcile it to that liberty in the exercise of our self-determining powers which we are conscious of, is a difficulty, I doubt, too great for us to explain. The sacred writer, in the Psalm referred to, makes this reflection upon it, which is the point I aim at, and we have reason to join with him, ** such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain to it.* But though the divine knowledge is wonderful, it is not therefore incredible; we are convinced by examples very familiar to us, that one mind may have powers of perception which another can form no idea of. The lowest of our perceptive faculties, the senses, no one can have a notion of, who is himself without the organs of them. A man born blind can no more comprehend vision, than a finite mind can comprehend omniscience; no more understand how sight discerns and distinguishes colours in the surface of a body, than how God sees the hearts and thoughts of his creatures. A being which is only sensitive can have no idea of

of pure abstract intelligence ; and an understanding which by laborious reasoning discovers some truths and believes others upon very slender grounds, must conceive very imperfectly of that superior capacity by which the same objects are discerned intuitively and with the greatest certainty. The power of judging the hearts of men, and fore-knowing future contingencies is, properly speaking peculiar to the supreme mind. Yet there is a very low and imperfect resemblance of it in the shrewd conjectures some men will make of the dispositions and conduct of others, with whose tempers they are well acquainted, and whose circumstances are known to them. Is there any absurdity in believing that an infinite understanding may know certainly what a weak man can guess at? But if we had no such assistance in apprehending it, this branch of the divine knowledge, implying no contradiction, and being otherwise sufficiently evident, ought to be admitted without any scruple ; and surely, in the whole compass of religious principles, there is not any which should more deeply affect the human heart.

Lastly, if we consider the moral perfections of the Deity in this view, we shall find that here also our thoughts are embarrassed with difficulties, which, in our present state at least,

SERM. do not admit of full solution. We seem indeed to proceed upon very clear grounds in our inquiries, and to have more distinct and determinate ideas than we have of the natural attributes; God having himself shewed us that which is good, and written the work of the law upon our hearts, the bright image of his own moral rectitude. The mind of man does as plainly discern justice and goodness, and can as well distinguish between them and the contrary dispositions and characters in a free agent, as between the sensible qualities of material objects by the external senses. It should seem then, that to form a complete notion of the divine moral perfections, we have no more to do than to remove all the infirmities which we find cleaving to virtue in ourselves, and that thus we shall fully understand them. And yet if we look into this great subject attentively, and consider God as a moral agent, acting with most perfect freedom, and yet acting immutably according to one invariable Rule, our thoughts will naturally lead us into many speculations concerning liberty and necessity, and into controversies which have long, but to little purpose indeed, exercised the minds of the learned and curious, and in which they find no end. And even with respect to goodness itself, by which we understand an affectionate

tionate disposition to make others happy, and of which we seem to have the clearest idea, what difference must there be between this in us, and that original benevolence which must necessarily be acknowledged essential to the divine mind, *prior* to the existence of all beings, and the first cause or spring of existence to them all.

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Upon the whole then, we may conclude, that the objection or prejudice against the truth or importance, and application to practical purposes, of the first principles of religion, the being and perfections of God, is a weak, indeed an absurd one, not having any foundation in reason, but proceeding from the narrowness of the human understanding, rather from the pride of men's hearts, and the depravity of their affections. Must our weak understandings, baffled in such a multitude of instances, unable to comprehend the essences of the lowest being in the world,—must they be made the standard of the being and reality of things without us, in this sense, that nothing shall be allowed to have an existence, or any truth of importance which we do not comprehend? We have no clear and distinct ideas of substances material or immaterial; shall we therefore discard them all from existence itself, and reduce all our knowledge of

Q₃ things,

SERM. things, of the affairs of life, and the whole
VI. world about us, to a dream or a phantastic
vision of our own imaginations? Shall we
deny the eternity, immensity, and self-existence of the supreme Being, because we cannot comprehend them, when after our utmost endeavours to banish them, the ideas of incomprehensible eternity, immensity, and self-existence, must remain in our minds? Shall we say that God is not almighty and omniscient, because we cannot comprehend his power to perfection, and because his knowledge is too wonderful for us we cannot attain to it, when we are convinced by plain familiar examples, that the ideas of one kind of power can furnish us with no idea of another kind of power as really existing; and when we are sensible that the clearest perceptions by one perceptive faculty, cannot give us the least notion of the perceptions of another faculty? Or shall we disbelieve the divine moral character, merely because in thinking of it our minds are involved in difficulties, (these above-mentioned, or any others,) which we cannot fully solve? Or can we justify ourselves in the negligence of principles, of the truth of which we have the clearest and most satisfying evidence, and are capable of being improved to the most important practical purposes, only
because

because we cannot fully comprehend every thing relating to them? SERM.
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The incomprehensibleness of this subject is no more a just pretence for our disregarding or neglecting to apply our minds to the serious and affectionate consideration of it, than for denying it. The affections of men to things, and their thoughtfulness about them, are not governed by the knowledge of their natures, but by a sense of their importance and usefulness. The covetous man does not cease to think of his gold, because he does not understand its essence and its specific attributes; nor will the voluptuous quit the thoughts of sensual pleasures because the natural philosophy of it is above his reach; nor is a more moderate and reasonable regard to those, and such like lower objects which are useful in life, abandoned, because we do not fully comprehend their nature. By a parity of reason, (rather a vast superiority, the case being of infinitely greater moment,) a pious well-disposed mind will not abandon its affectionate meditations on God, because it cannot by searching find him out. He hath shewed us that which may be known of himself, his eternal power and God-head, his wisdom, his goodness, and rightful dominion over us, which are the immediate and just foundations of our dutiful respect to him,

SERM. and we are without excuse if we do not glorify him as God, and if we be not thankful, but become vain in our imaginations, neglecting his service and giving ourselves up to vile affections. St. Paul observes very justly, that * *the world by wisdom knew not God*, meaning the *Greek Philosophers* who sought after wisdom. They pretended to, at least aimed at, a comprehensive knowledge of every thing; but by a fond conceit of their own abilities, they were misled in their curious ill-conducted inquiries into dangerous errors, some of them into atheism itself. The same author directs us to a safer and more successful method of inquiry, when he says, † *If any man love God, the same is known of him*, rather it should be translated, *he is made to know him*. By a sincere attention to the discoveries God has made of himself to men, with good dispositions, such knowledge may be attained as is sufficient to excite devout affections, which is the true end of knowledge.

If we proceed farther in the consideration of this point, we shall find that the incomprehensibleness of God is, not only no reason for our having any doubts concerning his Being and attributes, or for our neglecting to think of him, but that on the contrary, it contains powerful motives to pious affections, and meditations.

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

† 1 Cor. viii. 3.

ditations. I do not say that ignorance can produce devotion, its only genuine offspring is blind superstition. We read * that St. Paul, observing at *Athens* the devotion of the people, saw an altar inscribed to the *unknown God*; which gave him an occasion to instruct them, by declaring to them the God whom they worshipped ignorantly; not by describing his metaphysical essence, but representing him under the plain character of the maker of the world and all things that are therein. But there is a great difference between ignorance of God, that is, of what may be known of him, (which is perfectly inconsistent with true piety, taking away the very foundation of it,) between that, I say, and an inability to comprehend him fully, which is acknowledged to be the condition of the most enlarged human understanding. The former must render men incapable of any rational worship; the latter should only check vain presumption but not hinder humble and sober inquiries into, and affectionate meditations upon, what so nearly concerns us, indeed is of the greatest possible importance both to our duty and our interest.

Let us therefore consider, that the difficulty of this subject, so far as it is peculiar, (for the essences of all things are above our comprehension)

* Acts xvii.

SERM. henfion,) arifes from its peculiar excellency;

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and the very reason why we cannot comprehend it is its transcendent perfection, which, instead of abating, should increase our affectionate regards. Admiration is natural to the mind of man, and accompanies its most delightful entertainments. The objects of affection, which are thoroughly understood, (and we are fure every thing in them that can excite defire is completely known,) become familiar even to satiety. The mind regards them with indifference, nay fome degree of contempt, as imagining itfelf to have a kind of fuperiority over them; but its naturally afpiring powers apply themfelves with frefh vigor, and ftill with frefh pleafure, to the contemplation of excellence, which 'tis fenfible is an over-match for its capacity; and ftill the more it is confidered, the more it appears to have a dignity and beauty in it which furpaffes our thoughts. This fhews that God has made the foul for himfelf, and for beholding his glory; having given it fuch a conftitution that no perfection lefs than infinite, that is, none but his own, can fully fatisfy it. For, whereas our lower appetites and paffions, and the pleafure that attends the gratification of them, are limited as the objects are, fo that when they exceed the proper limits which are fixed

to their natural state, they become hurtful S E R M.
and uneasy instead of pleasant, there are no VI.
bounds to our best affections (affections to rational and moral excellence, which is the divine excellence) nor to the most agreeable sensations wherewith they are accompanied. Reverence, esteem, love, desire, delight, can never be raised, even in our imagination, to such a height, but that they are capable of increase; and the reason is, because the proper object of them is infinite and incomprehensible. Why should we then stain the glory of our nature? Why should we abuse our noble powers to unworthy purposes, and prostitute them to mean enjoyments? Let us follow the directions of the law of our nature, and attend those lower affairs which the condition of the present life requires, (as it is the will of God we should,) but not make them our principal business and our highest enjoyment. Let our chief care be to know God, and our chief delight to converse with him in the manner we are now capable of, that we may be fitted for that happy state in which we shall see him as he is, more directly and immediately than we do at present, yet not so as to comprehend him; but our knowledge shall be always increasing, and with it our happiness, for no finite mind can understand *the Almighty to perfection.*

SERMON VII.

The Divine Perfections incomprehensible.

Job xi. 7.

Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto Perfection?

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IN the foregoing discourse, from these words I endeavoured to shew, that the nature and perfections of God are, and necessarily must be, to us incomprehensible. I design at this time to consider them in a different sense, but which they will as well bear, namely, as importing the unsearchableness of the divine counsels and administration of providence. This seems indeed to be directly the design of the text. For the occasion of it being a warm debate between *Job* and his friends upon the subject of his extraordinary afflictions, and he having in the preceding chapter uttered some very passionate complaints, *Zophar*, much to the purpose, puts him in mind of the depth of God's judgments,

ments, that is, providential dispensations, and SERM.
VII.
that the reasons of them lie out of the reach
of human understanding. Upon a like oc-
casion, I mean, an event of providence very
difficult to be explained, and which was ex-
tremely shocking to some who were immedi-
ately affected by it, that is, the rejection of
the *Jews* from their national and religious
privileges as God's peculiar people, and the
calling of the *Gentiles*, the apostle *Paul* falls
into this exclamation, * *O the depth of the
riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of
God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and
his ways past finding out!*

I will endeavour in this discourse to fix the true meaning of the doctrine, and to shew in what sense, and for what reasons, the counsels of God, and the administration of his providence are inscrutable by us; and then I will consider what influence it ought to have upon our minds, in directing our sentiments, and governing our dispositions and behaviour.

First, To fix the true meaning of this doctrine, and shew in what sense, and for what reasons, the counsels of God, and the administration of his providence are inscrutable by us. Here is an essential difference between atheism and religious principles; and upon this one point the debate chiefly turns,—whether

* Rom. xi. 33.

SERM. ther there be any such thing as a wise scheme
 VII. of providence? Whether the world be go-
 verned by an intelligent and good being, or
 by blind chance, or fatal undesigning neces-
 sity; rather, if there be no such thing in it as
 order and government at all? It is acknow-
 ledged on both sides, that particular events are
 to us unaccountable: The sceptic says so, and
 triumphs in it, as the ground of his argu-
 ments and the strength of his cause; the reli-
 gious confesses it. But the question is, whe-
 ther this acknowledged unaccountableness
 proceeds from the want of wisdom in the dis-
 poser of all things, or from the abundance
 of it? Whether there be no counsel and no
 wise disposition in the affairs of the world, or,
 if because of the weakness of our understand-
 ings, and the very nature and reason of things,
 that wise disposition only lies beyond our reach,
 and cannot in many instances be discerned
 by us?

My present intention is not to enter into
 this debate; the great principle of religion
 referred to, being, I think, established with
 sufficient evidence in the preceding discourses.
 For the providence of God signifies the exer-
 cise of his perfections in the preservation and
 government of the world. If then he is every
 where present, every where active and intel-
 ligent,

ligent, and all his creatures, their beings, S E R M.
powers, and operations necessarily depend upon him,—hence arises the idea of his supreme VII.

universal dominion, our conceptions of which must be formed according to the notion we have of his character. Now if it be proved that he is perfectly wise, righteous, and good, it follows, that his whole administration is agreeable to these attributes, whatever variety there is in it arising from the difference of the beings over which it is exercised, and the different ends they are capable of serving. Inanimate things are governed by irresistible will; sensitive creatures by instincts planted in them; and moral agents by rational motives fit to influence their self-determining powers. Still however, from the perfect intelligence of the Deity, and his moral character, we cannot avoid inferring, that there is an uniformity in his whole conduct; for wisdom, equity, and goodness, are always consistent, and invariably pursue one end. And indeed the appearances plainly lead us to conclude unity of design; and that as the world in its original composition, (as various as it is,) consisting of numberless parts and numberless kinds of beings, is a regular system, so it is still under the direction of one counsel, which continually inspects every part of it, and cares for the whole.

It

SERM. VII. It is therefore to be supposed as the foundation upon which we proceed, that all the divine dispensations are conducted with wisdom, and with an inviolable regard to moral rectitude and goodness. When *St. Paul*, in the passage before referred to, declares that the judgments of God are unsearchable, he, first, asserts that there is a depth of wisdom and knowledge at the bottom, which is the very reason of their unsearchableness, and not, on the contrary, an undesigning ignorance and want of counsel in them. Indeed, without this supposition the subject of our inquiry would be lost. If there were no wisdom and goodness in the government of the world, the judgments of God, if they might be so called, would be unsearchable and past finding out; but that would amount to no more than this, that neither ours nor any other understanding could find out the reason or the wisdom and goodness of them, because there would be no wisdom and goodness in them.

Let it be farther observed, that the principal evidence we have of the wisdom and moral perfections of God is by the manifestations of them in the methods of his providence. Therefore we conclude that he is wise, righteous, and good, because we see the marks of wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, in his works

works and ways. Some attentive persons per-
haps see the force of the arguments, which are

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called *a priori*, for the perfections of the Deity, This sort of proof however is not easily apprehended by every one. The reasoning is more obvious from effects to their causes, from operation to power, from the marks of contrivance to wisdom, and from the fruits of bounty to a beneficent principle. Now, in order to our conviction in that way, we must be able to discern the characters of wisdom and prevailing goodness in a system which falls under our observation; that is, we must see more regularity than disorder, and more of a tendency to good than evil. It will not be sufficient to say, that whatever prevalence of confusion and evil there may be in the present state of things, the wise and good governor can set all right hereafter: For we want first to be satisfied in point of reason by some positive evidence, that wisdom does direct his counsels, and that goodness is the principle of his actions; which evidence cannot be fetched from unknown futurity. It is true, when once we have attained to full satisfaction on this head, partial and particular disorders will not appear shocking, nor the permission of some evil; because we can easily suppose it may be over-ruled for greater good,

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and

SERM. and whatever seems amiss now, it may be

VII. hoped, will be rectified in a future state: But
here is the foundation on which the mind reasonably rests; it traces the foot-steps of wise design, and perceives a prevailing tendency to happiness in the constitution and government of the world so far as it comes within our knowledge; from whence it justly infers, that it must be so throughout, since he appears to be a wise and benevolent being, who rules over all. I conclude, the defence of providence is not wholly to be rested on a future state, nor this world to be represented so extremely bad, as if nothing but confusion and evil reigned in it. For there is a sufficient evidence to an impartial considerate mind from the present constitution of things, and the general providential direction of worldly affairs and events; from the adjustment of inanimate things, their powers and effects, to the living, the sensitive, and rational part of the creation: the powers and instincts whereby these latter are furnished, fitting them for their proper ends and uses, which ends are in a great measure answered;—There is, I say, sufficient evidence for these, and such like considerations, of ruling wisdom and goodness in our world.

But

But others run into an opposite, more un-
reasonable, and dangerous extreme. They ima-
gine, that if wisdom and moral goodness di-
rect the divine counsels, this should be mani-
fest to their understandings in every thing,
and they will not acknowledge it to be where
they do not see it: Their own knowledge is to
be the standard of right and wrong, even in
judging of the works and ways of God; and
unless the characters of divine perfection ap-
pear upon every one of them apart, so as their
own minds can discern them, they are to be
condemned. Our answer here is, that the
ways of God are unsearchable, and his judg-
ments past finding out; That though he has
made all his works in number, weight, and
measure, with the exactest skill, yet the nar-
row human understanding is unequal to the
comprehension of it in every particular part:
Tho' all the appointments of providence are
according to truth, equity, and goodness, yet
our weak minds cannot trace the marks of
these perfections on every one of them singly.
This is the point I am to illustrate, and to ac-
count for in general, so far as to shew we have
abundant reason to acquiesce in the divine dis-
positions of things, and to maintain a dutiful
respect to the wise and good author, notwith-
standing the incomprehensibleness of his ways.

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SERM. VII. Let us, in order to this, only at present suppose, (what we firmly believe to be true, and seems to be proved by fully convincing arguments,) that there is such a visible and mutual dependence in the several parts of the world as necessarily leads us to acknowledge an intended harmony, and unity of design in the frame and government of it;—That one supreme mind or active intelligence has made the vast fabric, contrived and fitted to each other all the parts so as to compose an intire regular system; and the same mind has formed the plan of providence, comprehending the whole series of events which have been, are, and shall be;—That as the wisdom of God is manifested in the vast variety of his works, with different degrees of perfection, and a capacity of serving different purposes, and in the numberless multitude of individuals belonging to the several kinds, so the same wisdom is manifested in making provision for them suitable to their several natures and uses; none of them is forgotten before God, but he cares for them as related to each other and parts of the whole, nor for each singly, as having a separate interest and divided from the rest. Upon these suppositions, it follows that the scheme of providence cannot be comprehended by the human understanding, and it is impossible but that

that God's judgments must be to us unsearch-
able. What understanding can reach to such
numberless relations and remote issues as are
contained in so vast a scheme, except his, to
whom all his works are known from the be-
ginning, and who sees the end of them? And
consequently some particular dispensations,
tho' in themselves and as they relate to the
whole plan, necessary, serving excellent pur-
poses, must yet, upon our partial view of them,
have a contrary appearance. If it be so, the
objection against the wisdom and goodness of
providence taken from the darkness and my-
steriousness of its ways, quite evanishes;
amounting to no proof of any thing but our
ignorance, or rather the utter inability of our
minds to comprehend it; and the appearances
of disorder in the world are, with respect to
the supreme government, no more than ap-
pearances, not real disorder and evil. Nor have
we any reason to judge so concerning them,
since supposing that infinite wisdom, moral
rectitude, and goodness, governs the world,
it is impossible in the nature of things, that
our imperfect understandings should be able
to discern this fully in every particular in-
stance, and things must necessarily appear to
us just as in fact they do. In this light let
us consider those incidents in human life which

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SERM. seem to be the most grievous, and the most
 VII. difficultly reconciled to the wisdom and the moral character of the supreme Ruler; the difficulty, upon calm reflection, will disappear, as meaning no more than the shortness of our views, and we shall cease to censure the ways of providence as unequal. If wickedness be prosperous for some time, and *sentence against evil works be not speedily executed*, on the contrary the wicked persecuting *men of the world*, as the *Psalmist* calls them *, *are filled with hid treasure*, and by the methods of violence and cruelty acquire a large portion in this life, which they continue possessed of till death, and leave a plentiful inheritance to their children;—in such a case weak rash minds may imagine that justice has forsaken the earth, and the affairs of mankind are lost in the utmost confusion. But who can tell what good purposes such a disposition may serve? And why may not a future time for punishment be more properly chosen than the present, by a governor who has all times equally in his power? If a good man suffers grievous afflictions, who knows the antecedent causes or consequent effects of such an event, and what important ends in the universe, or in the divine government of moral agents it may answer? God never does any thing contrary to justice or to good-

* Psal. xvii. 14.

goodness ; but he may do, and actually does SERM.
many things, the justice and goodness where- VII.
of, more than the wisdom of them, we cannot at present discern. Some antient writers have not inelegantly compared the plan of providence to a dramatic compofure, wherein there ought to be one main design purfued, but there may be a confiderable diversity of parts and characters, every one of which it fhould be the author's care to conduct properly, but they are not to be judged of each by itfelf without reference to the main end, and therefore cannot be rightly judged till the winding up of the whole.

This may be illuftrated by the familiar example of human governments, which do not, nor can properly communicate the fecret of all their counfels to their fubjects : they may have important defigns for the public good not fit to be made public in every ftep of their progrefs. Hence arife difficulties in the adminiftration, and fome of the meafures appear wrong and improper to thofe who are not let into the knowledge of the true and intire defign. But while the rules of juftice and clemency are throughout the whole empire ftedily obferved in the main, it is not reafonably complained of that fome affairs of ftate are not fully underftood, becaufe every confiderate

SERM. person knows that this is unavoidable. In like
 VII. manner the administration of the Almighty,
 (whose kingdom ruleth over all,) has its secrets
 which his frail creatures ought not to pry into,
 nor have they any reason to complain that they
 cannot comprehend them. Thus *Elibu* an-
 swers *Job's* complaint against divine providence
 chastening him, and reducing him to silence
 from this consideration, * *that God is greater*
than man, and giveth not any account of his
matters. We have sufficient discoveries of his
 wisdom and moral perfections so far as to lay
 a just foundation for our duty; but is it to be
 expected or demanded further, that he should
 bring down every one of his works and ways
 to the level of our understandings? What obli-
 gations is he under to open the springs of all
 his counsels to us, and shew us the reason of
 all his dispensations? If it should appear con-
 gruous to his goodness and wisdom as our law-
 giver not to require any thing of us as duty,
 merely in the way of sovereign dominion,
 without affording us means of knowing the
 grounds of those actions he enjoins us to do;
 (which is, at least, his ordinary way of deal-
 ing with mankind,) does it therefore follow,
 that he must explain to us the grounds of his
 own actions too? Shall weak mortals, living
 in a remote obscure part of the world, pretend

to

* Job xxxiii. 12, 13.

to fathom the administration of the universal Monarch, and that the secret of all his counsels should be communicated to them? No

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certainly; it becomes us to rest contented with those things which he has been pleased to reveal to men, and to their children, *that they may do his commandments*, without inquiring into secret things which belong to him; and to be satisfied with the clear evidence we have, *that judgment and justice are the habitation of his throne, mercy and faithfulness are ever before him, though clouds and darkness are round about him*, and we cannot penetrate into those secret counsels which are the reserved rights of his supreme Majesty.

That the unsearchableness of God's judgments, or of his dispensations and appointments, that is, of the wisdom and goodness of them, does not proceed from the want of clear enough characters of those perfections in the sovereign disposer, but merely from the scantiness of our knowledge, or of our intellectual capacity, may appear from this consideration, that still the better they are understood, the greater beauty, order, and usefulness are discerned in them. As in the formation of nature many things have been censured as blemishes by men of little learning and a high conceit of themselves, which later discoveries

SERM. coveries and improvements of science have set

VII. in quite another light, shewing them to be very useful, (such as wide seas, barren desarts, great rocks, and tracts of mountains,) so these events have been rashly judged to be foolish or evil, the result of no contrivance, or evil design, which time has discovered to be real beauties, and to have carried on important good ends, quite contrary to what men could have apprehended from them. When some scenes of providence are taken apart, which relate to particular persons, families, and nations, the event shews such wise and good designs intended and gradually accomplished in them, as no mortal could have found out by the first appearances, but rather would have expected the contrary. Many instances of this kind we have in the sacred history, as in the case of *Job*, in the families of *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, and in their descendants; where we cannot but observe that in the inscrutable judgments of God, many things which the best of men thought to be against them, have in the issue turned out to their great advantage, nay, and to a more extensive good than they could have imagined. So would the whole mysterious plot of providence, (of which these and such like examples are but short imperfect sketches, yet profitably

bly observed for the confirmation of our faith S E R M.
in him who is invisible,) so, I say, would the **VII.**
whole appear beautiful, wise, and good, if we
had capacities large enough to discern it; and
still the more we know of it, the more we
shall be convinced of and admire its beauty,
wisdom, and goodness; in the mean time
many of its particular ways must, for the rea-
sons already given, be hid from us in impen-
etrable obscurity. I come,

Secondly, To consider what influence this
doctrine concerning the unsearchableness of
God's judgments, ought to have on our minds,
in directing our sentiments, and governing
our dispositions and behaviour. What I have
all along aimed at in this discourse, is, to
prevent our rash censures of the works and
ways of God from their incomprehensibleness,
or presuming to call in question his wisdom,
and his moral perfections. *Vain man would be
wise.* In the pride of his heart, and a fond
conceit of his own knowledge, he makes it
the standard whereby to judge of the truth
and reason of things, so far, as that not any
thing that shall have a being which is too
high for his understanding, and all those
measures must be pronounced wrong which
he cannot comprehend. Now, since it is al-
lowed that the conduct of providence is above
our

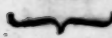
SERM. our comprehension, and many of its dispensa-
 VII. tions we cannot account for, not discerning the
 reason and the good design of them ;—if it is
 therefore not to be believed that they are
 under the direction of wise and good counsel,
 the unhappy consequence is, that the world
 is, at least in part, governed by mere chance,
 or an independent ill principle, than which
 nothing can be imagined more melancholy
 and destructive to all true religion : As on the
 contrary no perswasion can be of greater im-
 portance to our comfort, and to the preserving
 a pious and virtuous temper of mind, than this,
 that one supreme, independent, perfectly wise,
 and good Being, is the cause of all things,
 continually presiding over the universe, and
 directing all its affairs for the best.

The human mind is made with a pleasing
 sense of regularity as the effect of wisdom ; and
 nothing can be more disagreeable to it than
 the contrary. It is no more in our power not
 to admire a beautiful contrivance which dis-
 covers wise design in the author, and not to
 be displeased with a thoughtless tumultuous
 jumble of things, than not to feel bodily pain
 and pleasure from the objects which raise
 these sensations in us. At the same time, we
 as necessarily approve moral goodness ; and
 whenever that is not acknowledged in the con-
 duct

duct of any agent, we can have no pleasure SERM.
in it. Without this, wisdom itself degenerates VII.
into base abhorred cunning, and power be-
comes the most frightful of all things. Thus

the case stands between atheistical and religious opinions with respect to the government of the universe, and they have a directly opposite influence on the mind. The belief of a God, at the head of nature, guiding its course, superintending the world, and disposing all events in it with perfect wisdom and goodness, raises an idea of the most exact universal order, which is the noblest and most delightful subject of contemplation; it sets every thing in a fair and amiable light; it diffuses peace and serenity through the soul, soothes its disagreeable uneasy passions, disposes it to bear its proper part in the universal harmony, and to imitate the ruling wisdom and benignity which governs the whole. But the thought of living in a distracted universe, where confusion reigns, good and evil happen promiscuously, without any intelligent direction, (at least there is no prevailing good design which over-rules all for the best,) this must have the quite contrary effect upon the mind: It raises horror, contempt and dislike; it naturally sours the temper, rendering it displeased with itself and every thing about it, disinclined
either

SERM. either to receive or communicate pleasure.

VII.  So fatal is the tendency of disbelieving that great article, the supreme, constant, unerring government of an infinitely wise and good, as well as powerful, divine providence. It is ever-five not only of piety, but of virtue likewise, abating and hindering the proper effect of the generous and kind affections; it destroys the very foundation of all rational confidence, and indeed all rational enjoyment; it takes away the principal and only effectual support of patience and contentment under misfortunes, which experience shews that our state in this world is always liable to. It is therefore above all things necessary that we endeavour to establish our hearts in an affectionate persuasion of this most important truth, and apply it on all proper occasions as a powerful preservative of virtue and a never-failing spring of consolation in the vicissitudes of life.

The Gospel represents faith, and very reasonably, as a principle of religion, absolutely necessary, and of the utmost importance; without which it is impossible to please God, for it is the main spring of sincere obedience to his laws, and it imports that confidence in his wisdom and paternal care for us, which claims an essential part of our dutiful respect for him. Faith is not merely a naked assent

to

to religious truths, such as the being of God, S E R M.
his attributes, or any other points which he has V I I.
manifested to us. In that alone there is no vir-
tue; for it does not depend on good affections,
but clear evidence, which the mind however
disinclined cannot resist. St. *James* teaches
us *, that the devils, the most wicked and
abandoned of all intelligent creatures, believe
and tremble. But faith imports an affectio-
nate trust in God's wisdom, his fatherly com-
passion to us, and his constant care for all
his creatures, as a most righteous and benefi-
cent ruler over them. The great compre-
hensive object of this faith, the animating
principle of a religious life, and the chief
support of our comfort and security of mind,
is that unsearchable wisdom and goodness
of divine providence which I have endea-
voured to explain and to justify. And as it
is a main part of our fealty to our supreme
Lord, he tries it by various, to us unaccoun-
table, events in our state of probation; and
when it is approved, it is more precious than
gold, as St. *Peter* speaks, †, and *found unto*
praise, and honour, and glory: They are his fa-
vourite servants in whom it is the most sincere
and the most firm. Therefore was *Abraham*
honoured with the character of the friend of
God, and the *father of the faithful*, because
he

* James ii. 19.

† 1 Peter i. 17.

SERM. he believed God, and *it was accounted to him*

VII. *for righteousness; he hoped against hope, and*
 retained his confidence in the divine mercy and truth when seemingly contrary appearances put it to the severest trial. If we suppose a future state of complete happiness to good men, and that the present is a state of trial, of discipline, and improvement, (which is the foundation of the Christian scheme,) nothing can appear more rational than that we should be tried in this manner, and that the principal duty required of us should be an implicit confidence in God, with absolute submission to his will. Our condition is like that of children, imperfect in knowledge, and unfit to have the disposing of themselves, or even to be let into the secret of the measures that are taken with them. There is nothing more becoming that tender age than an intire trust in, and unrepining submission to those who have the direction of its affairs. Thus it is that God deals with us, he leads us thro' the mazes of life unknowing of our way; he gives us such instructions as our capacity will bear, contained in short and easy precepts. But to reveal the secret of his counsels concerning us, would only confound our weak understandings, and instead of being useful for our direction, so perplex and embarrass our minds, as
 to

to render us wholly unfit for the part he has appointed us to act. In such a case there is no qualification or disposition in us more pleasing to him, and more suitable to our state, than a perfect confidence in his wisdom and his love, with absolute resignation. SERM. VII.

But it must be acknowledged there are very few of mankind who constantly and uniformly maintain this good temper of mind, or this faith in prevailing exercise. There are times when even the best men can hardly support themselves in the steady affectionate belief of the supreme, all-wise, and gracious governing providence. Especially, in cases which very nearly concern ourselves, and most sensibly affect our own interest, we are apt peevishly to arraign the conduct of the Almighty towards us, and enter into judgment with him; or perhaps in a confusion of thought to quarrel with the order of the world, without attending to the sovereign disposing cause of all events in it. So good a man as *Job* presumed in a very harsh unbecoming manner to expostulate with the great ruler of the world upon his dispensations, even to blame them as unkind and scarcely righteous, because the trial he met with was not according to the ordinary methods of providence, and seemed to be very severe, consider-

SERM. ing the goodness of his character, and the up-
VII. rightness of his own heart, of which he was
conscious, and that he could not accuse himself of any secret wickedness. How usual are bitter complaints of hard fortune, ill usage, and a bad state of things in the world, as if order were violated, and at least perfect goodness did not irresistibly govern? But sincerely religious minds strive to preserve a good affection to the laws and government of the universe, against all temptations; and even to reconcile themselves to some hardships which ruling wisdom sees fit to impose upon them at present, believing that they are intended for, and shall terminate in, good. To which purpose nothing can be so effectual as a constant and careful attention to the evidences we have of the divine absolute supremacy, infinite wisdom, moral rectitude, and goodness, from whence we reasonably infer, that all things are ordered for the greatest absolute good, which the moral perfections of the Deity determine him to pursue as his ultimate end, and his infallible understanding directs him to do it in the properest manner. And tho' present appearances, to our broken and partial view of things may seem to contradict this principle, we should not on that account suffer ourselves to be shocked in the belief

lief of it. For the satisfying answer to all S E R M.
objections of that sort is, that we are not VII.
competent judges of the ways of God, because
we cannot see them perfectly. The very argument which fastened a conviction on the mind of *Job* and silenced all his complaints, (and it will have the same effect on all who seriously and deliberately attend to it,) was the incomprehensibleness of the divine perfections exercised in his providence. For from that topic *Elibu* drew his reasoning with him to which he made no reply; and afterwards God himself, when he vouchsafed to speak to him immediately, urged it upon him in a more powerful and effectual manner, so that it produced an humble and thorough submission.

In the next place, it follows, that human projects and schemes of action, are liable to great uncertainties, since the scheme of providence comprehending all events is to us unsearchable. It pleases God to govern the world by general laws, which establish an ordinary course of events open to the observation of every one. This is the foundation upon which we form our designs, and employ our active powers in executing them. But though it be sufficient to the purposes of life under the care of all-ruling providence, yet so far from being absolutely certain, it amounts to a low
S 2 degree

SERM. degree of probability. The husbandman pre-

VII.

pare his ground and sows his seed in the proper season, upon the prospect of a plentiful harvest; The merchant lays out his trading stock in expectation of a profitable return; But the event is utterly unknown, there being no necessary connexion in the reason of things between the means and the end; and the purposes of the supreme disposing power are hid from our understandings. So it is in all the affairs of human life; for as *Solomon* teaches us, * *there are many devices in a man's heart*, but they cannot ascertain the event, *the counsel of the Lord that only shall stand*. The same author justly observes, † that as no one can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun, so none knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow. Our judgment concerning things under the sun, or temporal events, what is really and absolutely good for ourselves, or what is best in the whole, is as uncertain as our knowledge of what shall come to pass in any future time: They are equally concealed from our view in the secret counsels of that sovereign mind which sees all things in the remotest issues of them.

The proper use to be made of this observation is, not that we should abandon ourselves

* Prov. xix. 21.

† Ecclef. vi. 12.

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selfes to a supine negligence of worldly con-
cerns, because the event of them is involved
in such uncertainty, or so much as abate a
moderate industry in the prosecution of them.
Every man who attentively considers the hu-
man constitution, and the whole of our pre-
sent condition of being, must be convinced,
that it is the will of God and the law of our
nature, that we should employ our thoughts
and our labour in providing for the comfort-
able enjoyment of life, and the advantage of
our fellow-creatures; but it should abate our
solicitude about such events, and all the pas-
sions which terminate on them. It does not
become a wise man to let loose his eager de-
sires to objects which he has not a reasonable
hope of obtaining; to indulge himself profusely
in the enjoyment of that which he holds by
very uncertain tenure, or to fear immoderate-
ly what he does not know shall ever happen;
and if it should, is as capable of being advan-
tageous to him as hurtful; nor ought he to
grieve excessively when it comes to pass.
These are the passions most dangerous to our
virtue, and destructive to our tranquillity; and
if we cannot root them out of our nature, (as
indeed we cannot, nor should we attempt it,
for they are an useful part of our constitution,
if duly governed,) yet this consideration ought

S E R M.
VII.
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SER M. to check their exorbitances, and will have that

VII. effect if we carefully attend to it, that the
 { objects of them are covered from our knowledge, they are out of our power and our foresight, we neither know their futurity, nor how they will affect us; for God has reserved the absolute uncontrouled direction of them in his own hands, and his judgments are unsearchable.

There is one kind of human action not affected by this argument, that is, the last event of it is not subject to uncertainty, and God has intimated with sufficient clearness, that he will distinguish it with his favour when the mystery of providence shall be fulfilled; I mean the practice of virtue, which we are sure is *good for man under the sun*; and we have the greatest reason to believe will make him happy in another world. Though the judgments of God are unsearchable with respect to the things of this world, (no man knows what shall befall him in this life, and when the end of it shall be; nor does he know whether prosperity or adversity, poverty or riches, sickness or health, honour or dishonour, is good for him,) yet we know what is morally good, for God *bath shewed it to us, and what he bath required*, and we know it has an established inseparable connexion with our hap-

happiness. Solomon observes, that *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong* *; SERM. VII.

we cannot be assured of success in any of our present undertakings, let the designs be ever so well laid, and the appearances promising as far as human skill and abilities can reach.

But in the religious and virtuous course we run *not uncertainly*, and in that war we fight *not as those that beat the air* †, for it shall be well with the righteous ‡, the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of it quietness and assurance for ever ||. If wisdom, rectitude, and goodness govern the world, and the administration, (however perplexed it may appear at present,) be under the direction of these principles, order and good must prevail; and they cannot be finally unhappy who steddily adhere to its interests, and conduct themselves by the same principles. And,

Lastly, This important instruction arises from the doctrine of the text, that we should fear God. The proper objects of fear or reverence, are wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. In the degree wherein those attributes belong to any character, it attracts our veneration. Among men, the wisest and the best are the most esteemed: Not that the greatest outward respect is paid to them, for that ge-

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nerally

* Eccles. ix. 11. † 1 Cor. ix. 28. ‡ James iii. 10.
|| Isa. xxxiii. 17.

SERMON. nerally follows the outward circumstances of

VII. wordly condition, power, and riches ; but they have the largest share in the inward affection of those to whom their worth is known. Now, these perfections are in the Deity absolute and infinite, so that we cannot by searching find them out. It is not any defect, but the plenitude of them which is incomprehensible ; therefore do they justly claim our humblest reverence. This argument very sensibly affected the mind of *Job*, and produced in him a religious dread of the divine Majesty *, *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive him ; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him ; he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him.* I am sensible that his providence, though invisible, is continually active in all the quarters of the world, guiding the motions of all the creatures, and doing whatever pleaseth him. And though the good man could assure his heart, his conscience witnessing his integrity, *He knoweth, says he, the way that I take, my foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept and not declined, neither have I gone back from the commandments of his lips. I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.* But there are secrets in his dispensations which our short and

* Chap. xxiii. 8.

and limited understandings cannot account SERM.
VII.
for, nor make any certain judgment concern-
ing the design and the event of them. For

he adds, * *He is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, that he doth, for he performeth the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with him.* He governs the world with steady counsel, and pursues his designs independently on those things that would influence and alter feeble human resolution, so that his measures are to us impenetrable, being conducted with infinitely superior wisdom, as well as irresistible power. The conclusion is, *therefore am I troubled at his presence; when I consider, I am afraid of him.* My inmost soul stands in awe of his transcendent greatness; and the unfathomable depth of his administration, (which is not at a distance, but intimately present,) taking all my concerns within its care. The same pious person having † elsewhere described the utmost efforts of human skill and industry, shews how weak they are and defective, when compared with the infinitely more extensive knowledge of God, who only knoweth the ways of wisdom, and the place of understanding; from whence he infers, that to man *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

S E R-

* Job xxii. 13, 14. † Chap. xxiii.

SERMON. nerally follows the outward circumstances of

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S E R-

* Job xxii. 13, 14. † Chap. xxiii.

S E R M O N V I I I .

Religion distinguished from Superstition, and shewn to be true Wisdom.

Job xxviii. 28.

And unto Man be said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is understanding.

S E R M .
V I I I .

W I S D O M is naturally agreeable to the human mind ; and indeed cannot but be agreeable to an intelligent nature, because it is the best use of understanding, and the proper improvement of reason. What is it that makes confusion and disorder so distasteful, as in an irregular jumble of things and heaps of materials casually thrown together ? And on the contrary, regularity in any work or system, and exact proportion and relation in the parts, and harmony in the whole, appear so beautiful ? Certainly, it is because counsel and contrivance, that is, wisdom, is

is apprehended in the latter, and the want of SERM.
it in the other. But applying this to ourselves, VIII.

and to the direction of our own affairs, we shall be yet more sensible how much wisdom is necessarily in our esteem, and of how great importance to our happiness. For, as we are inwardly conscious of an intelligent principle, our satisfaction in the part we act, always depends upon our knowing that we are governed by it. Events which have no dependence on our own choice or intention may affect us very sensibly, whether they be supposed to come by chance, or necessity, or by the will of another agent;—They may, I say, affect us, but in a manner very different from our own actions with the foreseen necessary consequences of them, which are directly the objects of the mind's approbation or disapprobation, and give us pleasure upon the review of them, only so far as we appear to our selves to have acted wisely.

Nay so true are mankind universally to this rule of conduct, however they may be mistaken in the application of it, that in all their divided opinions and pursuits, most directly contradictory to each other, every one flatters himself, that he has reason on his side. The religious man, the philosopher, the politician, the œconomist, and even the sordid miser, and the

SERM. the luxurious, such, at least, of these several
VIII. sects as are the most fixed in their opposite
courses, and thoroughly governed by their denominating principle, (and in them the case is fairly stated,) imagine that their choice is, all circumstances considered, the best, and their behaviour the wisest. The men of pleasure and gayety who seem professedly to despise wisdom, (it is only what they fancy to be the outward appearances and affectation of it that is the object of their ridicule,) they think that good sense and reason is with them, which is but another name for wisdom, that the end of their persecutions is something real, a sensible pleasure, (and there is no arguing against experience) and that the superior enjoyments which others talk of are but visionary. The more grave and sober man, who is wholly devoted to his worldly interest, which he decently and skilfully pursues, imagines he knows the world well, (which he reckons a point of great wisdom,) and the designs he carries on are well concerted, solid and substantial, leaving spiritual and intellectual pleasures, so called, which he despises in his heart to the religionists and virtuosi, as well as the madness of licentious and expensive mirth to the prodigal. I observe this only to shew that there must be some appearance of wisdom

dom in our conduct to justify it to ourselves; SERM.
 and that we necessarily have such a regard to VIII.
 reason, that we cannot knowingly and deliberately act against its dictates with any contentment in our own minds. So that lusts and passions, let them be ever so strong, in order to their having a settled dominion in the heart, must silence understanding, or rather bring it over to their side. For supposing a man's choice, and the course he follows, to be never so foolish in itself, and in the judgment of others, he cannot be easy in it without, at least, a conceit of wisdom to countenance it, which is apparent in the case of the sluggard, (one of the lowest and most contemptible of all characters,) who, as *Solomon* observes, * *is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.*

Since it is so, this is one principal point which all our deliberations ought to aim at : and the question, by the decision whereof, we should be determined in our designs and courses of action is, whether they be wise or not, that is, becoming rational agents in our circumstances? And then it evidently follows, that we ought to examine ; there being no other way by which we can come to a rational judgment. Let it not be objected that examination is difficult, and we are in danger of mistaking. Difficulty should never be objected

* Prov. xxvi. 16.

SER M. jected against absolute necessity ; and for the
 VIII. danger of a wrong judgment whether is it
 greater in the way of a diligent enquiry, or
 of negligence ? The question is not, whether
 we shall be directed by the appearance of
 wisdom, or not ? that is unavoidable. But
 whether we are more likely to escape being
 misled by false appearances, and attain to the
 knowledge of the truth, and to satisfaction in
 our own minds, as acting a rational part, by
 examining, or not examining, by exercising
 our own reason, or not exercising it ?

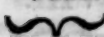
Let the most important of all causes, that
 of religion itself, be determined this way ; and
 the more important it is, the greater attention
 it deserves. My text says it is wisdom ; and
 it represents God as saying so unto man ; *he*
said, behold the fear of the Lord, that is wis-
dom, and to depart from evil is understanding.
 In the preceding verse it is shewn that man
 cannot penetrate into the counsels of God, his
 contrivances in the formation of the world,
 and in the government of it ; they are too deep
 for his understanding : *God's ways are un-*
searchable, and his judgments past finding out.
 But the truest wisdom for him, and the most
 suitable to his nature, that he may attain the
 highest perfection it is capable of, is religion,

or

or the fear of the Lord. This God himself SERM.
has taught us, and since he has condescended VIII.
to set it in that light, he has thereby sub-
jected it to our own enquiry and consideration;
it being impossible we should see any thing to
be wisdom, and rationally pronounce it so,
without examining it. Religion is not, un-
der the pretence of its being sacred and too
sublime for the human understanding, to be
taken upon trust without enquiring into the
grounds of it: For thus we should expose our-
selves a prey to every imposture, and have no
means left of distinguishing between truth and
falshood, in a matter which of all others is
the most important. Let every man's reason
be judge for himself what he shall believe as
truth, and what he shall embrace as wisdom;
for we have no other faculty by which we can
discern either. To give an assent upon other
terms, is what our minds are not capable of.

Now though the assertion of the text, that
the fear of the Lord is wisdom, generally
passes for true among christians, (however it
may be too little considered, and have too little
influence on men's practice,) yet it is avowed-
ly opposed by some who represent all religion
as unreasonable, both in its foundation, and
its tendency. They pretend, first of all, that
there is at bottom nothing in it but what is
com-

S E R M. commonly called superstition, a blind and irra-

VIII.  tional dread of we don't know what, founded on foolish unexamined notions, originally invented, and still cherished by artful designing men to keep the bulk of mankind in a state of servile subjection, handed down by tradition, and imbibed by the prejudices of education, which are known to be often so strongly impressed on tender minds, that it is extremely difficult to throw them off, even when reason has arrived to its maturity; and the generality of men are too easily inclined to receive these religious errors thro' the weakness of their understandings and the timorousness of their tempers. To state this matter fairly, it must be acknowledged that it is too often the reproachful infirmity of men, (utterly inconsistent with wisdom and the impartial use of reason,) to be led by prejudice. They receive opinions and take the measures of their conduct without examining upon what grounds: Their passions, their selfish affections, custom, and the authority and example of others, have an influence which they ought not to have on their judgments, and stand in the place of reasons. How many instances are there of notions generally prevailing in whole ages and nations, which have no other foundation than unexamined customary tradition?

But

But this is not to be carried so far as to an universal conclusion that men are always mistaken in the opinions commonly received by them. There is such a thing as truth and certainty, which every human mind is capable of discerning: And there are some points in which all men are agreed, (having an intuitive perception of them,) without any reasoning at all; or the evidence is so clear and so strong, that no one can help seeing it whenever it is intelligibly proposed.

Particularly, it is to be acknowledged that many very absurd opinions have obtained in the world under the name of religious principles; the propagation and reception whereof is to be accounted for in the manner alleged, by the subtle artifices of some men, and the weak credulity of others, by tradition and prejudice. And that there has been, and there is in many of mankind such a thing as superstition, an unreasonable groundless fear of some unseen and unknown agent or agents governing the world, (particularly human affairs,) by measures which have no foundation any where but in the imaginations of men; which arising from confused and mistaken notions concerning the Deity, and concerning virtue, and being conducted by the foolish fancies of the weak, or by the cunning arts of ill-designing

VOL. II. T men,

SERM. men, has produced false religion, and done

VIII. infinite mischief in the world. It has produced the worship of fictitious Deities, which by nature are no Gods, but the work of men's hands; or of inanimate beings, which can do no good nor evil, as the prophet speaks * of the heathen idols; of imaginary beings formed by the fancies of men according to the ruling lusts and passions of their own hearts, lascivious, cruel, covetous and revengeful, worshipped therefore in an impure and brutal manner, and in consequence of that, tending to confirm and increase all kinds of wickedness, debauchery, lewdness, and cruelty, in the worshippers. It has produced a causeless fearfulness in the tempers of men, dispiriting and rendering them unfit for pursuing the true ends, and applying themselves to the proper business of life. It has produced a vain ceremonious devotion, and a foolish pageantry of idle unprofitable rites. Nay so prone are many of mankind to superstition, that even the wisest religious institutions have not been able to preserve them from it. For when in these institutions external observances were appointed, yet expressly declared to be only instrumental, and intended as means in order to moral piety and virtue as the end,
the

* Isa. xli. 23.

the original design of such appointments has S E R M.
been perverted, by laying an undue stress on VIII.
the outward performance of them, placing
the whole of religion in them, and substitut-
ing them in the room of substantial purity and
righteousness, which was the superstition of the
Jews, often inveighed against by their pro-
phets, and is still the prevailing superstition
among many christians. And lastly, super-
stition has produced uncharitableness and dis-
cords, nay fierce contentions, wars, persecu-
tions, and every evil work.

But when all this is granted, it does not
follow, that there is no difference between re-
ligion and superstition, and that the former
is wholly to be resolved into the latter, or any
of its causes; into the natural timorousness of
men's tempers or the weakness of their under-
standings, into customary tradition or poli-
tical fiction. To bring this matter to a trial by
fair and impartial reason, we ought to con-
sider the main grounds of religion, together
with its direct and immediate tendency. If
it be founded on certain facts or principles
which the mind upon calm and attentive con-
sideration must assent to; and if, (considered
as a practical principle,) it points to a course of
action, and prescribes a conduct, which we
necessarily approve as most worthy of intelli-

SERM. gent agents, is it then essentially distinguished
 VIII. from superstition, which is a blind and irrational persuasion, and directs to practices which have no intrinsic excellency or fitness in themselves whereby they are recommended to the human mind.

Now the great principles upon which religion rests, are, the existence, the perfections, and providence of God, or that there is an eternal supreme intelligent being, infinitely powerful, wise, just, and good, who made all things, and who continually preserves and governs them. These principles, we think, are sufficiently proved by clear and convincing arguments, which must occur to every one who diligently inquires into this subject; and we desire no more than a calm and unprejudiced attention to them. It is true, the Deity is not an object of sense; no man hath seen him at any time, nor can see him, and we cannot find him by feeling after him in the gross corporeal way. But is any man sunk so low in reasoning, or rather altogether lost to it, as to make sense the sole measure of his belief and knowledge? Did he ever see that thing within himself, which thinks, perceives, believes, and argues? Yet he is as sure of its existence, nay more sure, than of any thing he sees. In like manner, *the invisible things*
 of

of the supreme Being from the creation of the SERM.
VIII.
world are clearly seen, being understood by the
things that are made, even his eternal power
and Godhead. If we cannot account for the
existence of any thing without supposing his;
nor for understanding, (which we are conscious
of in ourselves,) without supposing him intelli-
gent; nor for regularity and beauty in the uni-
verse, without wisdom and design in the great
disposing cause; nor morality, which is of so
great importance to the order and happiness
of all intelligent creatures, without allowing
his moral attributes,—one would think the
evidence of his being, (and consequently of his
providence, which is really no more than his
acting suitably to his character,) that, I say,
the evidence of this is very strong, and the
belief of it not fairly liable to the imputation
of weak credulity and superstition. Set
against this the atheistical scheme, which in
whatever shape it appears, excludes a supreme
directing and governing intelligence out of the
universe, substituting in the place of it chance
or necessity, (the meaning of which words, if
they have any, as expressing causality, let him
tell who can;) they should, however, have a
great deal of significancy, for mighty things
are attributed to them. Chance or necessity
produce the motion of bodies, and therefore

SERM. must be something different from bodies which
 VIII. plainly have no power to move themselves;
 nay they produce the most rapid, the constant, and regular motion of vast bodies, upon which the most important effects to innumerable beings and to a great united whole depend: Chance or necessity produce various beauty in the world, a regular uniformity of appearances, amidst an infinite variety of things; not only numberless individuals, but almost numberless kinds of vegetables and animals in our earth itself, preserved and propagated in an orderly and constant succession: And lastly, chance or necessity produce thought, self-determination, liberty, and virtue, with all its amiable fruits, yet without thinking, willing, or designing any thing. Let any man in his calm deliberate thoughts set this scheme against the other, that of Deity and providence which is the foundation of religion, and let him judge which of the two is the more rational.

I cannot propose at this time to insist on the argument largely; it has been the principal subject of the foregoing discourses. But I may safely assert that all who seriously consider it, will agree in this observation, which is directly to the present purpose, namely, that the belief of a Deity and providence has no affinity with superstition; it is not taken

up by tradition, education, or the influence of human authority, but grounded upon what we think the clearest evidence, and is the result of the strictest and most impartial search we are capable of making. It is not by a vain curiosity to know the reason of every thing, (joined with ignorance of true natural causes,) that we are led to acknowledge a God, the powerful and wise maker and contriver of the frame of nature, but it is because we see every other hypothesis not only insufficient to account for the appearances, but utterly absurd and impossible. For when the wisdom and energy of an intelligent agent is taken out of the universe, and denied to have any share in the origin of things, (which is done and must be done by atheism,) what is there left but dead and senseless matter? And what is its force upon the strictest philosophical examination? Nothing at all but a power of inactivity, (*vis inertiae*, as it is called,) or of resisting a change of its state. A goodly foundation to build such a fabric upon! without the interposition of any designing agent, as the world must appear to be, even to the slightest observer; but the more accurate searcher into nature, who has carried the power of matter and motion as far as it can go, finds the belief of a divine

SERM. agency and counsel forced upon his mind in
 VIII. every step of his progress, and by every ob-
 ject he turns his thoughts to.

But least of all can our belief of God and providence be with any colour of reason attributed to a natural timorousness of temper, or the passion of fear. For there is nothing in it frightful or shocking to the mind, at least to a well-disposed mind, which having its affections duly balanced, and the best use of all its powers, enjoys itself with the greatest inward rational satisfaction. The fear of God is not accompanied with such confusion and uneasiness as a superstitious dread is, which keeps the unhappy persons possessed with it in a perpetual pannic, and thereby sours their tempers, setting every thing about them in an uncomfortable light, and takes away the very relish of life. On the contrary, let the religious man be called to witness, and he speaks the language of his heart when he declares that there is nothing which sits so easy upon his mind as a true reverence for the Deity; that in the whole circle of known being, or the yet greater variety which his imagination can frame, there is no object which yields so much pleasure to his thoughts; it is the very central point of his soul's rest which no where else can find equal satisfaction,

tion, nor indeed without this any satisfaction at all. It diffuses in his thoughts, a pleasing harmony over the whole universe, and sets every thing in a fair amiable light, as being directed by the most perfect reason and goodness. The affections it raises in him have these plain characters of natural and rational, that they preserve to him the freest exercise of his intellectual powers, they sooth and calm all his disturbing passions, (so far is the fear of God from being a disturbing passion itself,) and they yield him the truest and most solid self-enjoyment, indeed the enjoyment of the whole world with delight. If it be otherwise, I mean, if the idea of God produces terror and consternation in the human mind, this certainly proceeds either from a fault within itself, from a consciousness of guilt, or a corrupt, vicious, perverse or malevolent disposition, to which perfect purity, righteousness, and goodness, cannot but be disagreeable and cause uneasiness; or else it must proceed from wrong notions of the supreme Being, as if he were an arbitrary ruler in a bad sense; possessed of absolute power, but not of moral perfections; and governing the world in the way only of sovereign dominion, without regard to justice and goodness. But to a well-disposed mind, a sincere

SER M. cere lover of virtue, which considers God as
 VIII. he truly is, perfectly wise, righteous, and
 benevolent, nothing can appear more rational, nor indeed more delightful, than the fear of him; that is, an awful sense of, and deep reverence, with the greatest and most affectionate esteem for, his majesty, and all his glorious perfections in conjunction, together with a constant care to please him by the regular practice of virtue, and to avoid offending him by any thing contrary to it, which leads us,

Secondly, To compare religion and superstition as practical principles, and to consider their opposite tendencies. As they have been shewn to differ widely in their foundation, the one being founded on the clearest rational evidence, the other only on prejudice, they differ as much in the dispositions and practice which they produce. The constant uniform effect of a superstitious belief, are a multitude of merely external acts; which have no antecedent goodness in themselves: Sometimes it puts men upon inventing and using obscene and impure rites, which would be shocking to the human mind not misled by the name and false colour of devotion: Very often it excites furious passions, which disturb the peace of societies, and is the occasion of fierce and
 cruel

cruel animosities among men. Whereas the SERM.
natural fruit of the fear of God is the practice VIII.
of virtue ; the doing of those things which
are pure, and just, and honest, and lovely,
and praise-worthy, which the mind necessarily
approves as having an intrinsic excellence.

One principle on which we rest the defence
of religion, receiving it as most certainly true,
is the real essential difference between moral
good and evil, or virtue and vice. There is
no debate at all concerning the signification
of these words : We know what is meant by
cruelty and mercy, by temperance and luxury ;
and other moral differences are as easily un-
derstood. We allege that these differences
have a necessary unchangeable foundation in
nature and reason ; and for determining it to
be so or not appeal to the common sense of
mankind ; not merely to the general opinion
which has prevailed in all nations of the
world, but to a more certain standard, a sense
which every single man, who has the exer-
cise of his reason, will find indelibly engraven
on his own heart, so that it is not in his
power to erase it if he would. If a clear and
distinct perception of the agreement and dis-
agreement of our own ideas be the certain
distinguishing mark of truth and falsehood in
points of speculation, which the mind rests in,
and

SERM. and can go no farther ; and if a clear and distinct perception of sensible qualities by our external senses be the foundation of all the knowledge we have of material objects, and we find ourselves obliged to acquiesce in it ; why should not as clear and distinct a perception of honesty and turpitude in human dispositions and actions, (which is uniform in the mind whenever the object is intelligibly proposed,) be equally satisfying to us as a foundation of knowledge and reasoning in morals ? If you insinuate to any man, that he may be mistaken in assenting to an axiom, or in judging of the distinction of colours, or between light and darkness, by his eye-sight, he looks upon the suspicion as absurd, and it is as much so in the other case. For that there is a real and necessary difference between moral good and evil, any one who calmly reflects can no more doubt, than that there is a difference between truth and falsehood in the plainest propositions which his mind discerns, or between light and darkness which he perceives by his eyes, between sweet and bitter which he perceives by his taste, or between harmony and discord which he distinguishes by his ear. It is true, the speculations and reasonings of men improving their understandings may enable them to discern this difference more clearly,
(as

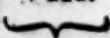
(as we know by experience that use makes SERM. some of our senses more exquisite,) and they VIII. may discover additional motives to the practice of virtue; (especially its conduciveness to the common good of mankind, and the happiness of every individual,) but the original idea of right and wrong in morals directly opposite to each other, are as natural, and their opposition as apparent to the mind, as any we have by our external senses or by reflection.

In vain do the adversaries of morality as founded in nature, here pretend to derive its origin from human laws, as if being bred up under political constitutions, we had from them learned our notions of just and unjust. For as every one who attends must see, that the difference reaches much farther than the laws of men, (and we discern it as plainly in cases where they have not at all interposed as in those which are expressly determined by them,) so he will find a necessary regard to it in his own heart prior to the consideration of human, or indeed any positive appointments or decisions, and independently on them; nay that he has in himself a certain measure of right and wrong, whereby to examine and to judge of all institutions and ordinances, so far from having learned the notion itself wholly from them.

Nor

SERM. Nor is there any weight in the objection,
 VIII. that a great many of mankind, (perhaps whole
 nations,) are ignorant of what others account
 important points of virtue. For in like man-
 ner the generality of men are ignorant of
 many propositions from which no man can
 withhold his assent when they are so proposed
 that he can understand them; so that the
 reality of virtue stands in this respect on the
 same foot with the most certain truths. And
 altho' we add, (what is true in fact,) that the
 prejudices of education, custom, and espe-
 cially false religion, may in some cases have
 corrupted and obscured the knowledge of
 good and evil, and occasioned mistakes con-
 cerning them, (just as an accidental indispo-
 sition in the organs of sense, may, in some
 particular cases, hinder the right perception
 of external objects,) yet this can never affect
 the whole of morality, nor destroy the agree-
 ableness of it so far as it is understood, and
 the disagreeableness of the contrary, to the
 human heart. And,

Lastly, That the sentiments of men con-
 cerning moral good and evil are not intirely
 owing to tradition, custom, and education,
 is evident from their constancy and unifor-
 mity. In things which have a foundation
 in nature, which is stable and always con-
 sistent,

sistent, all men agree. In things which take S E R M.
their rise from fancy and caprice, or depend VIII.
on particular circumstances and private views, 
their traditions and customs are variable.
What can be more different than the fashions
which obtain in nations, their manner of li-
ving, their forms of policy, their laws and
their religion, I mean the positive part of it,
or the rites of devotion and divine service?
And if their notions of morality were wholly
derived from the same origin, we should see
the same variety in them. Upon that suppo-
sition the notions of virtue might in some
places be the reverse of what they now uni-
versally are: The things which are unjust,
impure, and dishonest, might be lovely and
praise-worthy: It might be as reputable to
murder a kind indulgent father in cold blood
and without any provocation, as now it is to
punish the murderer, or to kill an assassin, or
a robber, in one's own defence. But this is so
apparently absurd you will scarcely imagine
human nature capable of it. Nay farther, I
believe none of us can doubt, but if you pro-
pose to the most uninstructed savage in the
world so as he can understand it, a compleat
moral character, consisting of undissembled
piety, justice, fidelity, and beneficence, it
will appear to him beautiful, and his soul will
in-

SERM. inwardly applaud it : Whereas the contrary,
 VIII. profaneness, fraud, perfidiousness, ingratitude,
 and cruelty, he can consider no otherwise than
 as abominable.

Now the fear of God, considered as a practical principle, has a necessary relation to these moral differences ; and the proper immediate use of it in the conduct of life is to direct men in doing good and eschewing evil, which evidently appears to be a wise and just design, most worthy of intelligent beings, and which 'tis impossible for us not to approve unless we be divested of humanity. But how unlike superstition, which always prescribes weak and fanciful usages, without any foundation in the reason of things, and without any connexion with the general good of mankind, or the rational happiness of any man ; sometimes barbarities which are abhorrent to nature, destructive of order and peace, and contrary to the best sentiments of the human mind ? 'Tis true, religion has been often mixed with superstition ; the fear of God has been taught by arbitrary precepts of men, and been abused to the promoting and establishing idle speculations, unprofitable ceremonies, and even uncharitableness, and other immoralities. Indeed very few public religious constitutions, not
 excepting

excepting those in christian countries, (even tho' settled on the best foundation, and professing to be directed by the best rule,) have been altogether free from this fault; some of them are incumbered with such a multitude of human inventions as to enervate true moral piety and virtue, the only valuable end of all religious constitutions. But surely it is unreasonable on that account to reject all religion in the lump, as if there were nothing in it but superstition; and to do so shews a rash and undistinguishing judgment, when the difference is so apparent, and every man's reason, if he deliberately attends to its voice, will lead him to discern it. What can be more rational and becoming intelligent creatures, than that being convinced by innumerable instances of wise and good design in the order of the world and in the frame of their own nature, they should inwardly acknowledge with affectionate reverence the one supreme maker and ruler of all, (clearly proved by his works and the whole of his administration, to be perfectly wise, righteous, and benevolent,) and from that principle to practise the virtues of justice and charity to their fellow creatures; the obligation to which he has deeply engraved on their hearts, and shewn the inseparable con-

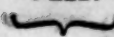
SERM. nexion of them with the most universal good

VIII. of all rational being? What affinity has superstition with this? or can it pretend to any such evidence for its doctrines, or any such excellence and usefulness in its precepts? For the honour of christianity, let it be observed, that it never represents the fear of God in any other view, than as inseparably connected with the essential duties of morality, nor applies to any other purpose than enforcing them. When the sacred writers teach men the fear of the Lord, they never explain it as consisting in the observance of positive rites even of divine appointment, (though that is also an inferior part of our homage to him,) but in keeping his commandments, that is, his immutable precepts of eternal righteousness, by living soberly and righteously, by departing from evil and doing good, seeking peace and pursuing it: duties to which we have a perpetual monitor in our own breasts; and we cannot help seeing their tendency to the greatest happiness of the human nature. Let every man then judge for himself, whether religion be not our true wisdom, and perfectly rational, while we apply it to these purposes and regularly pursue them.

Having thus endeavoured to refute the pretence against religion or the fear of God, that

that it is the same with superstition, an irrational unmanly thing, founded in the fearfulness of men's tempers and the weakness of their understandings; and to shew on the contrary, that it really deserves the character given it in my text, namely, that it is wisdom;—let us see now whether the charge of weakness and folly, in taking up opinions by prejudice and without an impartial examination, may not be fairly turned upon the professed adversaries of religion themselves. Here I do not insist on the apparent superiority of reason, as we think, on our side; tho' in so plain a case, where strong, we must even believe irrefragable arguments are intelligibly proposed, one cannot help suspecting that it is prepossession only which hinders men, (otherwise of tolerable understanding,) to see the force of them. But I will directly point out the particular prejudice which they give too evident cause to charge them with, and it is the viciousness and depravity of their own hearts and lives. Every one who has seriously considered the infirmity of human nature, must be sensible that the affections very often bias and mislead the judgment; and where a selfish interest or a passion opposite to any truth prevails, that truth is difficultly discerned and frequently denied, let the evidence

SERM. of it be ever so strong. This is the case of the

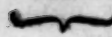
VIII.  unhappy men who have arrived at such a thorough infidelity as to be enemies to moral goodness even in speculation. By indulging habitually their sensual desires and passions, they become insensible of the beauty of virtue, (that divine form which strikes every uncorrupted human heart with the highest veneration and esteem,) and at last persuade themselves that it is no more than an empty shadow. Was there ever any undebauched mind brought by cool reasoning to a contempt of temperance, righteousness, sincerity, and benevolence? And what is there opposite to these qualities but passions of the most unmanly kind, passions for brutal pleasures, and for the basest selfishness, terminating in dishonesty and ill nature? If these may not be called prejudices, humanity must be given up with religion; and the principal glory of our nature abandoned, that we may become free reasoners.

This is the root of irreligion, and the greatest height of it is avowed atheism. When men are enemies to virtue in their hearts, the next step is to cast off the fear of God and faith in him; to deny his being and his attributes, and to argue against them. Where is the man that ever heartily loved moral rectitude,

tude, sincerely practised it, and affectionately SERM.
pleaded its cause, and at the same time was a VIII.

professed opposer of the Deity and providence? The moral system of the universe, and the moral perfections of God manifested in his administration, (and which it is apprehended will be yet more awfully displayed hereafter,) these, I say, are the points which the adversaries of piety and virtue quarrel with. Indeed it is no wonder that the obstinate haters of justice and goodness, cannot look upon infinite goodness and justice otherwise than with terror and aversion; and therefore to get rid of the uneasy apprehensions which arise from that view, they wish such disagreeable principles were not, and at last under the colour of some trifling pretences bring themselves to imagine they are not true. Let unbiaſſed reason determine where truth lies, and on which side there is the fairest occasion for an imputation of unmanly prejudice and weak credulity.

To conclude my discourse on this subject by applying it to ourselves, to professed believers in God and fearers of his name, particularly to christians, let us do all the honour we can to our religious profession by the purity and simplicity of a reasonable worship, and especially by the innocence and virtuous integrity of our lives. It must be acknow-

SERM. VIII.  ledged that the most rational principles of religion, (founded on the clearest and most satisfying evidence,) have been in many nations of the world, and are now in many christian countries, where they are openly maintained and gloried in,—have been, I say, dishonoured by a mixture of unreasonable opinions and superstitious rites; which some, pretending a great zeal for religion, have laid a mighty stress upon, as if the whole of piety consisted in them. This has given men of corrupt minds, and disinclined to the fear of God, an occasion of blaspheming it as altogether a weak and fanciful thing; which is indeed on their part unjustifiable, and discovers great weakness of understanding as well as depravity of affections: But at the same time it is extremely to be regretted, that the friends of religion should give its enemies such a handle against it. It should be our principal care always to offer unto God a *reasonable service*. That only is becoming us as intelligent creatures, and only will be acceptable to him who is a pure and perfectly intelligent spirit, and is to be worshipped in spirit and truth. Especially the christian institution does not place piety in external acts. The kingdom of God, * *St. Paul teaches us, is not meat and*

* Rom. xiv. 17.

and drink, nor any thing of an indifferent nature, which neither if we use it, are we the better, nor if we forbear it, are we the worse, (as he elsewhere speaks,) * but it is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The end of the † commandment which Jesus Christ gave to the world is not ritual observances, but charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned; and it is the constant doctrine of the apostles, agreeable to the original instruction of their master, ‡ that pure religion, and undefiled, before God the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

If true piety or the fear of God be wisdom at all, it is certainly practical wisdom, which, as Solomon observes, § is profitable to direct. Let the influence of it, then, appear in our lives, let it govern the dispositions of our minds and our whole behaviour, otherwise the best opinions we can have concerning God and religion are but idle and useless speculations. The proper direction of this principle is to the practice of righteousness and goodness; and so far only can we be said consistently to receive it, as it has that effect upon

U 4

us.

* I Cor. viii. 8.
§ Eccles. x. 10.

† I Tim. i. 5. ‡ James i. 27.

SERM. us. Judging by this rule, I am afraid irreligion still governs the hearts of many who make a contrary profession; and though they may applaud the wisdom of piety or the fear of God, there is another sort of wisdom which has a great share in their counsels, and in directing their conduct,—that wisdom which the apostle *Paul* * calls *fleshly*; and *St. James* † says, *it descendeth not from above, but is earthly and sensual*. How little is simplicity and godly sincerity regarded by men in their conversations, nay is it not thought low and despicable? How visibly do many, even professing godliness, form their schemes of life, and carry them on, wholly by the maxims of worldly policy? Do not we see that devout persons in whom religious sentiments habitually prevail, have difficulty enough to support themselves in a pious temper of mind and course of life, upon the principles of religion and morality, (certain and important as they are,) in opposition to the too common and often prosperous impiety of multitudes in the world, which is one of the strongest temptations good men meet with? It will therefore require our utmost care and attention to cherish and strengthen in our hearts a serious sense of the supreme Being, and of his

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† James iii. 15.

his attributes, as exercised in the government S E R M.
of the world ; with a high affectionate esteem VIII.
for him, producing a constant endeavour to
imitate his moral perfections, to keep his com-
mandments, and to depart from evil which
is understanding. Then shall we have an
experimental conviction in our own minds,
impregnable against all impious cavils, that
the fear of the Lord is true wisdom ; essen-
tially different from weak and foolish super-
stition ; and by the apparent fruits of reli-
gion in our lives, we shall be the most use-
ful in promoting its interest, to the glory of
God our heavenly Father, our own comfort,
and the good of mankind.

S E R-

S E R M O N IX.

Religion shewn to be perfectly consistent with the true Interest of Mankind.

Job xxviii. 28.

And unto Man be said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is understanding.

SERM. IX. **I**N the foregoing discourse from these words I endeavoured to vindicate true piety, or the fear of God, from the imputation of weakness and folly, in the principles on which it rests, and the practice which it prescribes; and to shew that it is essentially different from superstition, and not to be accounted for by any of its causes, — by the timorousness of men's tempers, or the weakness of their understandings, by political fiction, or customary tradition. There is another charge brought against religion by its adversaries, directly opposite to the character

racter given of it in the text, namely, it is SERM.
alleged to be contrary to the true interest of **IX.**

mankind, of every individual, and of the united bodies of men, or civil associations into which they have been obliged to form themselves for their common safety and advantage. Now, it is said, wisdom consists in pursuing the ends of our nature, and our happiness, by the best and most effectual methods we can devise in the circumstances wherein we are placed. How then can any institution or discipline be accounted wise, which restrains us in the use of that liberty, (as certainly religion does in many instances,) and abridges us of such enjoyment as our nature is capable of, nay prompts us to pursue?

If what has been already said to shew that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, be true, it can hardly be imagined that there is any force in this objection. If religion be perfectly agreeable to the rational human nature; if the main principles of it be so clear that we cannot resist the evidence of them, and we cannot possibly act in contradiction to its laws without the inward disapprobation and reproaches of our own hearts; and if there be a supreme wise and good governor of the universe to whom this is to be attributed, as being the necessary result of his constitution,—
if

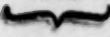
SERM. if, I say, these things be true, one would think

IX. it impossible there should be such an inconsistency in nature as that religion in the whole should be really hurtful to us : In other words, that it should be at the same time reasonable and unreasonable ; for truth and reason, if any thing, is consistent and uniform. Some lesser present inconveniencies may indeed attend a wise constitution ; they may even necessarily arise from the nature and condition of things, as it is true in fact that the practice of virtue is attended with some difficulty and uneasiness in our present imperfect probationary state. But considering how clearly it is taught and strongly enforced by reason, it cannot be imagined to be contrary, in the main, to our true happiness, if wisdom and goodness be manifested in the frame of our nature and the appointment of our condition.

But if we examine this pretence by itself more particularly, we shall find that it is ill grounded ; and that, on the contrary, there is a strict connexion between our duty and our true interest, whereby the arguments proving that the fear of the Lord is wisdom will receive a great addition of force, and it will appear reasonable in every view. First, it is alleged that religion lays severe restraints on men, forbidding the gratification of their
natural

natural appetites and passions; it requires them to deny themselves, and to mortify those affections which are the growth of nature, the tendency whereof is to set them at odds with themselves, and create a continual uneasiness in their breasts. Now, is it to be thought that the author of nature, (if he is so beneficent as religion represents him,) has given us desires which at the same time he has not allowed us to gratify, and even mocked us by placing enjoyment within our reach, to which we are solicited by a craving appetite, yet made it our duty to abstain with pain to ourselves? To make this argument conclusive, it would be necessary to prove that the highest felicity of man consists in the unrestrained gratification of every appetite and desire in his nature; which is so far from being true, that nothing is more certain than the contrary. If we will at all attend to our own constitution, and what we cannot help observing in ourselves, we must be convinced that the demands of our lower appetites and passions often interfere even among themselves, so that it is not in our power to comply with every one of them; besides their thwarting and contradicting the higher affections, in the immediate vigorous operation of which and the natural effects of them, the noblest

SERM. noblest enjoyment consist. The sensual in-

IX. clinations, the desire of wealth and honour, and the multitude of passions which continually excite us to actions of different kinds, (all of them under proper regulations useful, tending to our safety and the promoting of our interest,) these can none of them be indulged without controul. They must give place in their turns to each other; they must be at some times retrenched; and there must be an œconomy in the direction and government of them, that the ends and business of life may be pursued with any regularity, or tolerable degree of success. Now, what is the liberty that religion restrains, and which are the gratifications it forbids? It does not require men to root out, or to deny, at all times, and in every degree, any one affection which is the growth of nature; it only prohibits the exorbitances of passion, and that excessive indulgence of some appetites which is really hurtful to nature, and tends to embitter and to shorten life. Are luxury and debauchery, and the outrages of anger and revenge, such goodly pleasures and high enjoyments to a rational being, that the fear of God is to be censured as unfriendly to human nature for retrenching them; when indeed any one who will allow himself to think calmly, must see that

that these extravagancies are the violent symptoms of an unnatural distempered state, necessary to be removed in order to a found inward constitution, and to the true enjoyment of life? As there are not wanting examples in every age, and among ourselves, of the effects of temperance, contentment, meekness, and other private virtues, and of the contrary passions and vices, upon human life, let any one who will consider impartially, judge, which are the most conducive to what a wise man would chiefly value even in this world, and render our present condition of being the most easy and happy. It is to be hoped, in deciding this question, we shall have some consideration of a mind which every one is conscious of in himself, and sensible that by its self-reflections it has a great share in his happiness or misery. If a man's passions are so vehement that they hurry him away against the admonitions of his conscience, it will at some times break in upon his vicious enjoyments in spite of all his endeavours to silence its clamor, and make him feel the smart of its severe reproof for his folly and wickedness. Or if he should be able to get the better of it, and harden his heart into insensibility by a long course of stupifying vice, it is at such an expence of understanding,

SERM.
IX.

SERM. standing, and studied impairment of his rea-

IX. son, as would seem very reproachful to an intelligent creature. Upon the whole then, the precepts of religion which relate to self-government, are no dishonour to it; they do not lay it open to the charge of unreasonable severity, nor the conduct they prescribe, to the imputation of weakness and folly, as neglecting the true interest and happiness of the human nature, even in its present state of existence. Rather, on the other hand, the fear of God justly deserves the character of wisdom for the reason why *Solomon* often so celebrates it in his *Proverbs*; namely, because it contributes above all things to the satisfaction and prosperity of life, to health, length of days, riches, and honour, and especially to an easy, contented, self-approving mind, a principal ingredient in the happy state of every rational being.

Another important branch of religion or the fear of God, (for it comprehends the whole of morality,) are the virtues of the social and benevolent kind; and they, as well as those which terminate directly in ourselves, instead of being disadvantageous, are eminently useful for promoting all the happiness which we are capable of enjoying in this world. A peaceable temper, charity, fidelity, and justice,

tice, are qualities which procure a man such S E R M.
 esteem and confidence from those who are IX.
 acquainted with him, as tend greatly to secure
 life, and enlarge the enjoyments of it. Whereas the angry and malevolent passions not only
trouble a man's own flesh, as *Solomon* speaks *,
 that is, makes his own life uneasy, but produce great disorders in the world, strife and
 confusion, wars and desolations, with continual dangers, distress and perplexity to the
 authors of them. All this is so evident, even without any consideration of the fear or awe
 of God, (which is the greatest security of every virtue,) that an avowed unbeliever,
 consistently with his principles, might acknowledge it. *Epicurus* is said to have pro-
 fessed it as his opinion, that virtue is the greatest good of man, and to have placed the
 highest happiness in pleasures of the rational and moral kind; though vices of the most in-
 famous sort are still called by his name, and were patronised, at least the strongest barriers
 against them were certainly broken down, by his tenets. But this is a fair testimony from
 an atheist, that religion, (so far as it restrains our appetites and passions, and confines them
 within the bounds of virtue, of temperance, justice, and mercy,) is not deservedly liable

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to

* Prov. xi. 17.

S E R M. to censure and folly ; or an unreasonable en-
 IX. croachment on the rights of human nature.
 But,

In the next place, let us consider piety itself in the strictest sense, or the sentiments and affections which it imports, and we shall find that they are the only solid foundation upon which we can enjoy any true satisfaction and tranquillity of mind ; so far is it from being injurious to our interest. Upon the slightest view we can take of man, of his natural powers and affections, and of the condition in which he finds himself, it will most obviously occur to our thoughts, that he is an intelligent weak being, furnished indeed with noble powers, and which point to high attainments both in the way of understanding and fruition, but dependent and frail ; liable to inconveniencies from a multitude of things about him, as well as possessed of many enjoyments and advantages which cannot be attributed to his own power and providence, more than his avoiding of evils and dangers ; sensible from his own consciousness that his existence has not been of a long duration, and necessarily presaging the speedy dissolution of his life, by the examples of those of his own kind whom he sees every day dying, from the brittleness of his
 his

his own outward frame, and numberless SERM.
events he finds himself liable to, which are, IX.
in respect to his knowledge, perfect casualties,
and he has in himself no defence against
them; with all this, so naturally anxious
about futurity, that he cannot enjoy himself
or any thing else, at present, with full con-
tentedness of mind, unless he has hope con-
cerning it.

I believe it will be allowed, that this is a
just and fair view of the present state of man,
though but an imperfect one to my purpose,
and a more full representation would make
the argument appear stronger. Now let us
apply it to the religious and the infidel scheme,
as set against each other, that we may see
which is the most comfortable and advan-
tageous; in other words, which is the best
calculated to promote the true interest of man-
kind. The religious scheme teaches us, that
the whole world, and every part of it, is fill-
ed with intelligence and goodness; that we
ourselves, and all things about us which are
capable of affecting us in any manner, de-
rive our and their being and powers of every
kind from an infinitely wise and good cause,
upon which we and all things depend, and
which still governs the whole irresistibly, but
with the most perfect wisdom and benevo-
lence,

SERM. lence, extending its care and providence to

IX. all, even the minutest affairs of the world.

From this what may not be hoped for, that is truly desirable to a rational nature? There is ground to expect that every thing shall be ordered in the best manner; and though we ourselves cannot comprehend the intire reason of things, and the design of particular events, yet every thing really is just as it should be, that is, ordered according to the highest reason and the most perfect equity; for the greatest absolute good, or the greatest happiness of the whole intellectual system. Is not this what a man's heart would wish to be so? And if he finds it to be true, must it not yield him solid joy, as a foundation upon which he can rest with pleasure, support his mind in all events, and look to futurity with comfort.

But, on the other hand, the atheistical scheme spreads horror and confusion over the whole face of nature: According to it, the world is, as *Job* speaks of death, * *like a land of darkness, without any order, where the light is as darkness*. If we enquire concerning ourselves, our constitution, or our state present or future, as how came we into being, distinguished from many other kinds by peculiar power and privileges? The answer is,

* *Job* x. 22.

by the fortuitous concurrence of senseless atoms, SERM.
or by a blind undefigning fatality. How do IX.

we live? How are we preserved? To what cause can we assign the good we enjoy, that we may make the proper acknowledgments to which the affections of our nature prompt us? And how shall the evils we fear be prevented? The answer still is nothing but chance or necessity, which leaves no room for the exercise of hope or gratitude, our most delightful affections; and is at least a mighty discouragement to the use of our intellectual powers, in forming and pursuing any laudable designs in life, the most agreeable employment which the mind is capable of;—This, I say, is greatly discouraged by the principles of irreligion, there being according to them, no superior power, wisdom, and goodness, to whose approbation and protection we should endeavour to recommend ourselves and our works. And with what pleasure could any man apply his mind to the contemplation of order, or the study of promoting it, if he believed that infinite confusion prevails in the universe? Again, if we ask what shall become of us when we die? All the answer, and all the hope upon this hypothesis, is, that our very being shall be utterly extinguished, and cease for ever. But how

SERM. are we secured even of that? Have we not a chance for a future existence as well as annihilation? or if the event is determined by necessity, who can tell which of the two is necessary?

The point last mentioned deserves the particular attention of all unbelievers. Every one will acknowledge that if the principles of religion be true concerning the state of mankind, both present and future, that they are all now under trial and discipline, and hereafter to be rewarded or punished according as their works have been good or evil; if, I say, these principles be true, they are of the greatest importance, and determine what is our highest interest. Surely it can never be accounted wisdom to run the hazard of inexpressible future misery, for the pleasures here to be enjoyed in a vicious course of life, above what the virtuous mind is capable of; or to avoid some present uneasiness, such as accompanies the resisting of temptations, religious self-denial, or even the enduring of persecution,—to avoid this, I say, at the expence of a future perfect and eternal happiness. All the consolation of the infidel, and that only whereby he can pretend to justify his conduct, is, that future rewards or punishments are no more than political fictions, or enthusiastic

fiastic dreams, and there is no rational ground SERM.
IX.
to expect them. But what assurance has he

of this, to make him easy on a reasonable foundation? He should have demonstration which excludes the possibility of a mistake; or if the subject is not capable of that, at least such certainty as leaves no room to doubt. But this can never be attained. Does there appear to the human mind any contradiction in the idea of a future existence? Is not the continuance of our being as conceivable as the commencement of it? Indeed it is much more easily apprehended. Some have imagined an absurdity in a transition from nothing to being, or the production of a new real entity. However every mortal knows his consciousness had a beginning; and by consciousness alone he knows his personal existence, or the being of himself, than which nothing can be to him a more certain reality.

But the continuance of being is familiar to our thoughts, we know it experimentally, nor can any man be assured that it shall cease when he dies. We know not what death is, any further than that we see that the body ceases to be animated; but it does not necessarily follow that there shall be an utter cessation of thought and all its modes. Experience

SERM. shows that the thinking power remains undiminished when a limb is lost which once was animated; and what certainty can there be that it shall not remain still in its vigour, when by the dissolution of what is called life, the body shall change its form and turn to common earth?

IX. To argue against the justice of future punishments or their consistency with goodness is to acknowledge a moral system and ruling righteousness and goodness in the universe; from which the generality of mankind have thought the highest probability arises of recompences hereafter, considering the apparently promiscuous administration here, or rather that those divine perfections are but imperfectly, (tho' really in a degree discernible by every attentive mind,) manifested in this state, which has the plain characters of a probation-state. But it is not my design at present to establish that great principle of religion. All I aim at, is to show that there is no possible security against it; and we have no sufficient evidence from any principle, or fact, which falls within human knowledge, that it cannot be, (which, I think, is undeniably clear,) and therefore all which any unbeliever can pretend to in this matter is uncertainty.

Now,

Now, supposing it to be the case that a future state is to any man uncertain, and that he does not believe it, because he does not see reasons sufficient so to determine his judgment; at the same time he is not, nor can possibly be sure of the contrary;--the question is, how does wisdom require him to conduct himself with respect to it upon this supposition? And here, the *importance* of that future condition of being, supposed doubtful, is to be taken into consideration, and it must be allowed to be very great: The principles of religion represent it so; and the objections of the Infidels are not against this, but against the *truth* or the *credibility* of a future existence. What can the mind think of so awful, as that an omniscient, infinitely powerful, and righteous being, will bring every work of man into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or evil? That rewards and punishments shall be distributed in exact proportion to the moral rectitude and viciousness of all human actions? Who can comprehend the issues of that judgment, or imagine in what manner and to what degree they will affect him? It must be, as the scripture represents it, *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, the hands of his avenging justice. And who in this imperfect state can form an adequate

SER M. quate idea of that exceeding great and eternal

IX. weight of glory which shall be the recompence of sincere and persevering religion? If these events appear to the mind, not certain, but possible, and there is no convincing evidence against them; at the same time, we know, that if they come to pass, they have a necessary connexion with our moral character and behaviour, (which is not at all a point in question, this being the very reason why a future state is believed on the one side, and denied on the other,) but, if it be so, what influence should a doubt or uncertainty so circumstanced have upon our present temper and conduct? Here let men but parallel cases in their temporal affairs: Let them suppose, for example, a very great but uncertain danger to their lives, their reputation, or worldly interest, (which they have in their power to prevent,) and a very eminent, but uncertain advantage, to be obtained, which however, depends on some practicable, indeed not extremely difficult conditions,—let them ask themselves what prudence would direct them to do in a case so stated? I believe it will be agreed that a wise man would, for avoiding such an extreme, even tho' doubtful danger, forego a present small gratification, and submit to a small present inconvenience, and that

that he would be at some pains to secure his S E R M.
title to a great happiness, tho' it were uncertain; especially if it appeared that the pains so IX.

bestowed would not be very hurtful to his present interests. And let any man judge whether the practice of virtue, which is the only condition required, be so prejudicial to the interests of the present life, that he ought to risque an uncertain prospect of perfect happiness hereafter, rather than submit to it? All men find themselves obliged to form their schemes of life upon great uncertainties, and our principles of action are influenced by low degrees of probability, very often by presumptions which do not amount to any probability at all. And if this be the rule of conduct in some cases, why not in all? or can any reason be assigned why we should not have a regard to futurity, (supposed doubtful,) beyond death, as well as to uncertain futurity within the limits of the present life?

Thus it appears that the reasoning of some sceptics, from the alleged doubtfulness of religious principles, (particularly that concerning a future state,) to the purposes of irreligion, and to countenance an impious and immoral practice, is false and ill-grounded, contrary to the maxims by which all considerate persons govern themselves in like cases. Their
argu-

SERM. argument is, that if a state of retributions

IX. hereafter be uncertain, men are under no

obligation to act with regard to it, or to deny themselves any gratification on that account.

Whereas the directly contrary reasoning is just,

viz. that if it be only uncertain, (which is all that can be pretended, there being no positive evidence against it,) it becomes wise men

to provide against a doubtful danger, and

pursue the measures whereby they may be

safe in all events; since by these measures

they lose nothing, and they are not, in the

main, detrimental to any valuable interest.

But the truth is, as in the common affairs of

life men are often blind to their own true

interest, or diverted from the prosecution of

it by prejudices and prepossessions, especially

by vicious habits, still covering their self-de-

ceit under some weak pretences of reason;

and tho' health, and reputation, and worldly

prosperity, are sacrificed to a foolish passion,

yet they who are so unhappily deceived, hide

their folly from their own sight under false

colours and palliating excuses; so it is in this

concern of infinitely greater importance.

Men by a customary indulgence in the grati-

fication of their lower appetites and selfish de-

sires, have contracted strong immoral habits,

which have great power over their minds,

corrupting their affections ; misleading their judgments, so that they cannot discern the truth which is very clear to an unprejudiced understanding, and rendering them insensible of their own real advantage. Can it be thought that without an inward unfairness and dishonesty of heart, biaſſed by violent prejudices, any man would judge it wisdom to run the hazard of losing an endless perfect felicity, and incurring a grievous future punishment, (even supposed uncertain, for that is the supposition I am at present arguing upon) rather than live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world, for the short and evidently uncertain time in which he can with any colour of reason hope to enjoy the pleasures of sin. Upon the whole then, let every man judge for himself, (but let him seriously consider, and judge impartially, the matter being of the last moment,) whether practical religion or the fear of God be contrary to his true interest, taking into the account whatever he knows certainly will, or possibly may affect him, in every part and every state of his existence ; or if, on the contrary, it be not the surest and most effectual way to make him as happy as he is capable of being, and to provide for his safety
in

SERM. in all events; in other words, whether it be
 IX. not wisdom.

Lastly, We may consider men in their social capacity, as united together in political bodies or civil associations; and it is pretended that religion is inconsistent with their interest, nay subversive of their very foundations. At our entrance on this subject one observation occurs very obviously,—That the objections raised by infidels against religion are directly contradictory to each other, which makes them the less formidable. Sometimes it is represented as a political fiction, an engine invented for the service of civil governors, to keep the people in a thorough subjection to them; at other times it is, very inconsistently, alleged to be utterly destructive of civil policy. But as the former pretence has been found weak and ill supported, so, upon inquiry, this will appear to be without any just foundation.

Let it be remembered, that the fear of God takes in the social affections of men, and not only allows them their full scope and free exercise, but strongly enforces them. The first commandment of religion is, * *to love the Lord God with all the heart, and with all the soul and with all the mind*; and the second

* Matt. xxii. 37. 39.

cond is like unto it, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, that is, be ready to do good, as far as you have power and opportunity, to every one of mankind; never violate any of his rights, but do to them as you would expect or desire they should do to you in like circumstances. Between these two there is a necessary inseparable connexion, so that the profession of the former, (the love of God,) passes for nothing, unless it produces the other, righteousness, kind affections, and kind offices to men: For 'tis certain, the genuine principles of piety are not at all understood, nor have their due influence, if they are not thus applied, and bring not forth the fruits of justice, charity, and a peaceable disposition. This, one would think, is a firm cement of society, holding it together by the strongest bonds of sincere undissembled love to mankind, and a pious regard to the Deity. Whereas, by the opposite scheme, these obligations are made void; every single man is to be considered as an intire little whole by himself, unrelated to any system; possessed of existence, (however he came by it,) and a capacity of some enjoyments which he is to pursue independently on any other being; generosity, universal benevolence, public affections, patriotism, sincerity, gratitude, and espe-

SERM. especially the fear of God, (the principal security of them all,)—these are accounted chimeras,

IX. the visionary productions of distempered brains, without any real foundation in nature, or the cunning contrivance of artful men. It will be very strange, if such opinions shall appear to have a more favourable aspect on civil society and government, than the contrary ones of religion; and if a rational consistent scheme can be formed upon them, which will more effectually secure the just authority of rulers and the liberty of subjects.

What I have said, is not an unfair invidious representation of atheistical principles, however shocking it may seem to be. The men in that way of thinking openly profess what amounts to it, and from their own writings the following seems to be a just account of their scheme so far as it relates to the present subject. That the true original liberty of man consists in an unrestrained licence to do whatever his inclinations prompt him to do, without any consideration of the Interests or supposed privileges of any other beings; and the only measure of right is power; if one man could tyrannize over all the rest of his kind, and thought it for his happiness, (that is, that it would give him pleasure,) there is nothing to hinder

hinder him, the restraints of equity and con-
science being only imaginary. But in fact

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this is impracticable, because men are pretty
nearly equal in force ; at least any number of
men find themselves sufficiently able to resist
one, and therefore may refuse to submit to
his lust of domination, which is as much their
natural right as his. The case being so, the
state of nature is the worst of all states, and
men found themselves under a necessity of
getting out of it as fast as they could. For
what could it produce but perpetual discord
and confusion ? Every man's hand was against
his fellow, and nothing so formidable as
those of his own species, from whom no
good was to be expected unless it appeared
to be for their own private advantage, and
all kinds of mischief of fraud and cruelty to
be feared : Therefore their weakness, and
dangers which they were all sensible of, put
them upon a voluntary agreement for termi-
nating their differences, or rather their wars,
by relinquishing each his private rights, and
uniting their force in civil government ; which
being vested with all the rights that origi-
nally belonged to its constituents, has an in-
finite right as they call it, that is, an unli-
imited power over every individual, their pro-

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perties,

SER M. perties, their lives, and their consciences, being all put in absolute subjection to it.

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Let us enquire a little into these principles, which are even boasted of by the abettors of them, as the greatest security of civil power, and thereby of public peace. First, we may observe that these authors, in raising their fabric of civil authority, find themselves under a necessity of having recourse to something like moral obligations, tho' as explained by them, they are really but trifling, the foundation of them being first sapped by their own hypothesis. It is pretended, that rights once abandoned cannot be justly resumed, that contracts and covenants formally entered into bind men so that they cannot be violated without injustice; and here is one security of a commonwealth, which having received the surrender of private rights, must continue possess'd of them unalienably. But let any one show, if he can, how a man is bound by his own acts or words, the mere arbitrary declarations of his own will; how, I say, he can be bound by these, if he is under no precedent natural obligation. In the state of nature he has a right to every thing, and against every man, no otherwise limited than by the bounds of his power; he has not only a right of self-defence against the invader of his

his property, his liberty, or his life, but by SERM.
way of prevention, to invade, to oppress, to IX.
rob, to enslave, and murder, as supposing the
person so used to be actually his enemy, who
would treat him the same way if he could be
before hand with him. This right is under
no restraint in its exercise by justice, charity,
honesty, or conscience; but all kinds of de-
ceit and violence are lawful till civil power
is introduced. Now, what if compacts to
form and establish the rights of sovereignty
are not sincerely meant for that end, but the
real design of those that enter into them is
only to amuse and deceive others by this ar-
tifice; intending that the state of nature,
(which is a state of hostility,) shall continue,
and that they will exert all the power and
privileges of it when a fair opportunity shall
offer? There is nothing in all this wrong up-
on the principles I am considering, which
center in this, that every man has an original
right to use his reason and his active force in
the way which he thinks most for his private
advantage.

But there is no need of taking this so deep
as the very beginning of civil constitutions.
For at whatever time we consider them, and
in whatever state, even when they are formed
and settled in the best manner possible, if the

SERM. support of them be derived wholly from the
 IX. will of the members, (each renouncing his
 private right and transferring it, and conveying his force to the political body, without supposing any antecedent obligation in nature to give strength to this act,) then it may be revoked by the same will at any time ; for what the will can do, it can also undo, when there appears reason for undoing it.

But the writers in this controversy against religion, against natural morality, and the social affections of mankind, seem to be diffident of that basis upon which they place civil government, and which has been already considered, namely contracts and covenants. And therefore they have their recourse to another, which they hope will be more stable, having strength enough to secure itself ; that is, the force of the magistrate, to which all must submit. Sometimes they deduce from this alone the very nature and the measures of right and wrong in the whole extent of them ; for they say that justice and injustice are determined by a law, and a law is nothing else but the declared will of a superior with a sanction added to it. Let us see now upon what foot authority stands according to this account of it ; and it is plainly no other than superior power causing terror, or the weakness

ness and fear of its subjects. This does it not SERM.
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great honour, nor will make it appear amia-

ble to men, so long as the generous affections and a sense of liberty have any place in their hearts. But especially it is to be observed in opposition to these writers, that the security of civil government is hereby rendered precarious. There is nothing to hinder attempts against the public tranquillity, and the power which is raised to preserve it, but the danger of miscarrying in them. Whenever treasonable conspiracies can be formed, and rebellions raised with a fair probability of prevailing, all scruples vanish, and the actual success makes them actually just: The restraints of honour and conscience, and a regard to the public, are mere bugbears which keep fools in awe, but men of sense despise them. Let any one judge, who knows at all the state of mankind, whether these are principles which have a tendency to secure civil authority, and thereby to preserve peace and order among men.

But the main strength of our adversaries objection lies in this, that religion tends to weaken, and even to subvert civil government, by setting up private judgment or conscience as a superior tribunal in the breast of every subject, which claims a right of exa-

SERM. mining the acts of the highest human authority, and refusing obedience to them when

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it judges them to be wrong: Whereas their principles vest the civil sovereign with an absolute supremacy which no one has a right to dispute, but must implicitly yield, even an actual obedience to all its commands. I shall not insist on the abject condition to which this reduces the whole of mankind, (except the few who have the supreme magistracy in their hands,) because the men we have to do with in the present debate, avow no feeling of it, having professedly abandoned all sense of honour, liberty and virtue, unless so far as they are subservient to private interest. But with respect to the security of government itself, though we grant it is true that the principles of religion establish in every man a supremacy for himself, so that his conscience must be the last judge of his actions, yet this supremacy does not make void the proper exercise of civil authority, nor hinder its effects. For the right of conscience importing not merely a liberty but an obligation to do what is right and fit, is the greatest security of just obedience to the powers ordained of God, as well as of every thing else morally good that the human nature is capable of. But the question is, what advantage will be gained to
the

the civil power if conscience be displaced? SERM.
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Does the atheistical scheme substitute nothing in its room which may be equally dangerous?

Yes certainly; for it transfers the supremacy to arbitrary will, lust, and passion, all summed up in self-love, or the desire of private happiness, that is, pleasure, which of right is the absolute ruler in every human heart, and reason is intended not to controul, but to minister to it. Is this more friendly to civil sovereignty than conscience, which is founded on the notion of a real and essential difference in the nature of things, between just and unjust, moral good and evil; and therefore must tie up men's hands from public mischiefs, though they might gratify their own humours and inclinations.

I hope now it is sufficiently apparent, that the fear of God or sincere religion is wisdom in every view we can take of it; is founded, not on prejudice, but reason and truth, the highest reason and the most evident truth; and the tendency of it is to the greatest happiness both private and public which men can enjoy in this world, as well as to provide in the best manner we can for a future state of existence.

Upon that part of the subject which has been chiefly insisted on in this discourse, I shall

SERM. only make two reflections, and conclude.

IX. First, we may see the true cause of so much unhappiness as there is in the world. The present state of mankind is generally apprehended to be bad. Misfortunes are loudly complained of; sickness, poverty, disappointments, injuries, public calamities, all concluded to be, (because they are seen and felt,) infelicities to which our condition is liable, and attributed to different causes according to men's different ways of thinking, either to the immediate external occasions of them, without looking any farther, or to the appointment of providence, not without secret murmuring and discontent. But if we inquire wisely concerning this matter, we shall find that the most universal cause of natural evil is moral evil; and the true reason why there is so much misery in the earth, is because there is so much wickedness. The ordinary afflictions of human life are often the natural consequences of men's vices. Whence proceed sickness, poverty, and disgrace? For the most part, and visibly, from debauchery injustice and sloth. Whence wars and desolations? As plainly, from pride and ambition; or as St. James speaks, *from the lusts of men that war in their members*. Not that we should imagine there is always a strict and im-

immediate connexion in particular instances between irreligion and distress by the interposition of divine providence, as if they were to be reputed void of the fear of God, and sinners above all others, on whom the heaviest calamities fall, as in the example our Saviour mentions * of those on whom the tower of *Siloam* fell, and those whose blood *Pilate* mingled with their sacrifices. To judge after that manner, is to judge foolishly and uncharitably. For least of all are the extraordinary sufferings wherein God seems most apparently to interpose to be interpreted as a strict retribution, bearing exact proportion to the demerit of men's personal crimes ; but as the natural tendency of sin is to unhappiness, it has actually introduced a great deal of unhappiness into the world, which the wise God dispenses among the individuals of mankind as he sees fit, accommodating it to the purposes of his government in our state of probation ; and in this his judgments are unsearchable and his ways past finding out.

Secondly, We may observe with pleasure, that the declarations of scripture on this head are perfectly agreeable to the reason and truth of things, and to experience. They inculcate not only in general this doctrine, that the
fear

* Luke xiii.

SER M. fear of the Lord is wisdom, (the beginning and

IX. the perfection of it) that to fear God and
 keep his commandments is the whole duty,
 and whole happiness of man; but particularly,
 that it is the surest way to present tranquillity,
 to long life, health, honour, and riches; (so
 far as they are truly useful,) and that godli-
 ness is profitable to all things, having pro-
 mise of the life that now is, and that which
 is to come. And to the public good of so-
 cieties nothing can contribute so much as re-
 ligion. When it prevails, *nation shall not rise
 up against nation, neither shall they learn war
 any more*; men shall not hurt or destroy one
 another, *when the knowledge of the Lord shall
 fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea*. Up-
 on the whole then, the lovers of mankind,
 who are most desirous of their happiness,
 have nothing so much to wish and to en-
 deavour, as that piety may flourish among
 them. And for every one of ourselves in par-
 ticular, the best way to be as happy as we
 can be, even here, (besides our hopes in a
 future state,) is to amend the faults of our
 tempers and our lives by the rules of religion;
 for it will be found, bad as the world is, *that
 the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness,
 and all her paths are peace*.

SERMON X.

The Love of God explained and recommended.

Matthew xxii. 37.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy mind.

IF we have clear and satisfying evidence SERM.
X.
of the being of God, of his perfections natural and moral, of his having created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all things which are in them, and of his providence preserving them all, disposing the whole series of events in them with the most perfect wisdom, and for the greatest good, we can scarcely avoid this important inquiry, What regards are due to him from us his reasonable creatures? By looking into our minds we will perceive that they are differently affected with the objects that are presented to them; some excite desire, some joy, and

SERM. and others horror and aversion, and these

X. different affections to different objects are subdivided into various kinds. Though they come under the same common denomination of desire and aversion, yet the inward perceptions of them have very little affinity with each other; for example, the desire of meat and the desire of virtue, the aversion to bodily pain, and the aversion to moral turpitude. But whatever variety there is in them, they all originally belong to our nature, and result from our constitution, we cannot make and we cannot destroy them. It may be in our power, by an habitual attention to some objects, to strengthen the affections of the mind to them, and by diverting their attention from other objects, to weaken its affection to them, whereby the one obtains a prevalence over the other, forming our temper and engaging our pursuit: But the original affections themselves are constituted by nature the same and invariable, no more in the power of the mind, and dependent on its choice, as to their being or not being, than simple ideas are. Here we shall find ourselves obliged to rest. As the materials of our knowledge are limited, the imagination and the understanding may variously compound, associate, and distinguish them, but can cre-

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ate us no new ones, so are our affections. SERM.

When any object is proposed to the perceiving faculty, (perhaps before it is proposed, as in the case of bodily appetites,) whether it be by sense, by reflection, or in whatever manner, a certain propension towards it naturally arises, which we cannot hinder, nor alter, nor transfer to a different kind of object. For instance, the desire of food prevents any reasoning, deliberation, or choice, and we cannot possibly excite it to any other object: There is an approbation and esteem of moral excellence, as natural to the human soul, which we cannot apply to any thing which is not apprehended to be moral excellence: And the same may be said concerning all our other affections, the objects are limited, and the movements of the mind towards them depend solely on the constitution of our nature. It is in vain therefore to call in the assistance of foreign motives, such as those taken from interest, from the hope of happiness, or the fear of misery: These may strongly affect the mind, and operate on the springs of action, producing an earnest pursuit, but the discerned qualities of objects themselves can only excite affections to them. A man may be convinced that it is for his interest to have a particular affection; but this cannot immediately

X.

SER M. mediately produce it, nor have any other effect towards it, than to engage his earnest attention to the object till the exciting qualities are apprehended; and as soon as they appear, the affection naturally arises to itself.

X. It is farther to be observed, that as objects are introduced into the mind by various ways, some by sense, and others by reflection, at the first discernment of certain material beings there is raised a desire or aversion to them: And by attending to the voluntary operations of our minds, and to the external actions of other moral agents, (the evidence of their inward dispositions,) nay to imaginary characters considered under the distinction of morally right and wrong, there arise directly opposite affections, the difference of which we see as plainly and necessarily as we do the difference between desire and aversion to sensible things. All these equally belong to our nature, but are not of equal importance to the principal ends of it. Hunger and thirst are the appetites of man; bodily pleasure and pain are his natural sensations, of which he cannot divest himself, but when he deliberately attends to honesty, benevolence, and fidelity, an affection to these qualities is as natural to him, and a dislike of the contrary. To confine real affections to the objects of sense,

sense, and treat all others as imaginary, must proceed from the most stupid inconsideration.

We know with the greatest certainty, (because we are intimately conscious of it,) that something exists which cannot be perceived by our eyes, nor ears, nor any other corporeal organs, which is the object of our most intense love: We know that we have as distinct ideas of reason, wisdom, order, goodness, and justice, as of any sensible qualities; and that they as really affect our minds, tho' in a different manner; and that as these kinds of ideas are the principal subjects of our speculation, so our principal happiness depends upon them, indeed without them humanity would be degraded to a level with the brutal nature, and its enjoyments confined within a very narrow circle. Now if there are other beings, (not perceived by the external senses, but whose existence is fully proved,) to whom intellectual and moral qualities or perfections belong, which qualities in the degree wherein we discern them are highly esteemed by us, and the matter of our enjoyment; These beings are also the objects of affections which are natural to the human mind: Especially the most excellent of all beings, who is absolutely perfect in knowledge, wisdom, rectitude, and goodness, justly challenges our highest esteem and

SERM. and most affectionate regards. Nay, they will

X. naturally and ultimately, of their own accord, terminate upon him, if we have a firm persuasion of his being, and of those his attributes, and if we carefully attend to them. Perhaps some men having first formed their idea of love by, and accustoming themselves to appropriate the word to that emotion or passion they feel, and which they call love towards other subjects, have but a confused notion of the love of God, and even think it mere enthusiasm. But let us seriously consider the several obvious characters of the Deity, as they are manifested to us by his works, and observe the impressions they make and cannot but make on a calm unprejudiced mind, we shall then understand the affections to him which naturally arise in every human heart not sunk in stupid insensibility and viciousness, and which are comprehended in this sum of piety, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.*

First, The mind of man cannot avoid distinguishing in things which are presented to it, between beauty and deformity, regularity and confusion, being pleased with the one, and displeased with the other. A careful at-
tention

tention improves this sense, and makes the difference more discernible and more affecting, SERM.
X

but it has a foundation in nature. Scarcely any one is so ignorant and so unaccustomed to observe the diversity of forms, as not to see a superior excellence in some above others, consisting in order, proportion, and harmony; and to men of more enlarged understanding, and a more exquisite taste, the love of such beauty rises to a greater height, and gives a pleasure far exceeding all sensual gratifications. Whence does this proceed? And to what cause shall it be attributed? Surely it proceeds from our frame, and we are so constituted by nature; but yet if we observe how such beauty strikes our minds, we shall perceive in it a reference to an original, a designing intelligence, which produced it, and which is apprehended to be more excellent. When a man views attentively any curious production of human art, immediately it occurs to his thoughts, that this is not the effect of chance, which can never be the cause of order, nor give any pleasure to the mind, but that it is the result of contrivance; and it is his discerning the characters of understanding in the exact adjustment of the several parts, with their various relations, and the harmony of the whole, that gives him the agreeable

SERM. entertainment. Without this, if there be

X. any affection excited, it is but low, of a quite different kind from that which we are now considering, and still in proportion as the marks of wisdom are discovered in any work, so is our sense of its beauty and the pleasure of contemplating it. The materials are capable of any form, the most disagreeable as well as the most pleasing, and they are never apprehended to have formed themselves, it is the disposing intelligence which attracts the affection, and gives delight.

If from the low efforts of human skill and genius we take our rise to the works of nature, we shall see vastly more exquisite beauty, a more exact proportion, and perfect uniformity, amidst an infinitely greater variety of parts. Take any piece of inanimate nature diversified as we see it, the visible heavens, the wide seas, huge tracts of mountains, large forests, or any other which fills the sight;—These strike the contemplative mind with a delightful sensation, abstracting from all regard to the usefulness of them; but if we examine the sensations narrowly, it will appear to arise from the discerned regularity of the object, in other words, the manifestation of wise design in framing it. Add these works one to another, considering at the same time their mutual

tual relations, (the everlasting hills settled on SERM.
their unmoveable foundations, the tall trees X.
waving their slender tops in the fluid air, and
sheltering a multitude of feeble inhabitants,
yet safe; the valleys overspread with herbage
and corn, for the sustenance of man and
beast; the vast ocean circumscribed by limits,
which its waves in the greatest fury of them
cannot pass over; the celestial orbs preserving
their original distances from, and shedding
upon earth their benign influences;) in this
view the idea of order grows upon us, that is
of grand design, which is the just and the
natural object of affectionate admiration. But
all this is only an imperfect sketch of that
stupendous fabric, the universe, in every part
of which, that falls under our observation,
the same regularity appears, and a perfect
harmony in the whole. If we descend to a
particular survey of nature's works, the va-
riety is surprising; the curious frame of every
individual is astonishing; and the convenient
disposal of them all, is amazing. What a
numberless multitude of living forms do we
behold on this earth itself, the very lowest of
them inimitable by art, the structure of each
so nice that no human understanding can dis-
cern, nor penetrate into the secret springs of
its movements, and all so properly placed as

SERM. to have the best means of preservation, and a
X. full opportunity of exerting their vital powers?

If we carry our inquiries into the extent of created existence, beyond the reach of sense, the modern improvements which have been made in speculative knowledge will lead our reason to apprehend worlds above worlds, the limits of which we cannot so much as conjecture, and where the like order prevails as in our globe. So that the effect surpasses our imagination, much more the cause. Yet still the affection is a real natural affection, and the object is a really existing object, though incomprehensible. For let any man deny if he can, that his mind loves and is pleased with order, as the effect of wise design; and the more exact the order is, and the more comprehensive the design, the greater pleasure it yields, and the higher esteem it raises of the author. Nor shall I endeavour to prove, but suppose it as what you are fully convinced of, that there is one supreme, eternal, all comprehending mind, the fountain of being, and parent of the universe, who stretched out the heavens by his wisdom, and established the earth by his discretion; the original source of all beauty, harmony, and wisdom; and therefore the adequate object of our highest esteem and affection,

The

The intellectual and moral world contains S E R M.
a yet more wonderful and glorious display of X.
the divine wisdom, than the corporeal system
and the animal kingdom. A multitude of
derived and dependent beings, indued with
understanding and self-determining powers,
the image of the author's self-original spiritual
nature and attributes, each a distinct conscious
self, possessed of a dignity and perfection
which we cannot help thinking superior to
the whole of inanimate nature, all disposed
of in the best manner, the most suitable to
their capacities, and united in one society by
the common bond of benevolence, every in-
dividual directed by the instincts of its nature,
so far as a voluntary agent in such circum-
stances could be so directed, to promote the
common good,—How glorious is this great
family in heaven and earth, under a wise and
beautiful œconomy, all cared for by the pro-
vidence of its father! How amiable is he! I
do not speak of moral qualities, and disposi-
tions in them, (a faint similitude of his perfect
moral character, which is the object of ano-
ther affection,) but considering the whole
system of rational creatures placed in such or-
der as they are, and under an administration
suitable to their nature, it appears to be an
amazing production of power, and a wonder-
ful

SERM. ful manifestation of wisdom; which perfections concurring in one agent are the objects of our esteem and reverence in the degree wherein they are discerned. And as it is in contemplating the fabric of the material world, our idea of the creator's understanding and greatness, and our admiration rises in proportion to our knowledge of his work; the more accurately we examine its parts, and the farther we enlarge our considerations of its unmeasurable magnitude, the more curious and the more magnificent it appears; so it is here. If we study the constitution of a single intelligent creature, its various powers and affections as they are related to each other, and all harmoniously conspiring to answer the ends of its being, it is an astonishing contrivance. And if we consider the diversity of degrees in mental accomplishment which appear among the individuals of our own species, all under the direction of the father of lights; and the vastly more enlarged capacities with which superior orders, (we know not how many of them, nor with what distinctions,) are indued, all of them in different ways fulfilling the law of their creation, and having different enjoyment suitable to their several capacities;—Who can think of the great author without admiration, or forbear praising him with the most affectionate esteem?

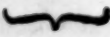
Lastly,

Lastly, If we consider all these works, each of them apart so marvelous, their number incomprehensible, their extent prodigious, their order so exquisite, all, I say, derived from one mind, a single agent, how wonderful is he! All the beauties shared among the numberless beings in heaven and earth, and the harmony of the whole, are the effects of his skill and contrivance; and all the scattered rays of understanding which in different degrees are to be found in the several orders of intelligent creatures, are emanations from this one pure eternal fountain of intellectual light. Can the human heart be indifferent to such a being? No surely; the attentive unprejudiced mind will find a respect to him arise in it which is unparallel'd in the whole compass of its affections, as the dignity and excellence of the object is without any parallel. The objects which are limited, and which it can thoroughly comprehend, are not adequate to its aspiring desires, it still seeks something beyond them; but it loses itself delightfully in the contemplation of infinite incomprehensible excellence, (in the present case infinite wisdom,) which necessarily attracts the highest veneration of an intelligent nature.

Secondly, Another essential perfection of the Deity is goodness, which naturally ap-

SER M. pears to our minds amiable, and is the object

X. of love in the strictest sense. Indeed without this, God himself could not be the complete object of our highest desires and most perfect enjoyment. For however venerable wisdom may appear, and the contemplation of it entertaining, it is not the only, nor the chief good of man: We have other affections which must have their suitable objects, and they appear in a different light from that of meer speculation, to make the mind happy. Of goodness we have a very distinct idea; every man understands by it a disposition to communicate happiness. We are conscious of some degree of it in ourselves, and we are convinced of it in others by its genuine fruits; but wherever it appears, and whenever the mind reflects upon it, it appears lovely, the object not only of approbation as some other qualities are, but of a strong affection. Let any man set against each other in his own thoughts these opposite characters, one benevolent and kind, ready to do good as far as it is in his power, and uniformly acting from that principle; the other malicious, endeavouring the destruction and misery of all within his reach, or even perfectly selfish, intent wholly on the pursuit of private enjoyment, without

without the least regard to the happiness of S E R M.
 other beings, nay, distressing them in the X.
 greatest degree, and in their highest interests, 
 if they stand in the way of his own satisfaction in any respect; and let him try if he can
 preserve a perfect indifference of heart to-
 wards these characters, without preferring the
 former to the latter. The truth is, they must
 be creatures otherwise made than we are, to
 whom disinterested goodness is not an object
 of love, and who find no pleasure in the con-
 templation of it.

I shall not insist on the evidences of God's
 goodness; they are the same with the evi-
 dences of his being. His works have the cha-
 racters of beneficence as well as of power and
 wisdom; and a benevolent principle, as truly
 as eternal power and godhead, is an invisible
 excellence of his nature, which *from the crea-*
tion of the world is clearly seen, being under-
stood by the things which he has made. What
 an amazing variety of enjoyment belongs to
 the sensitive and the rational life, all derived
 from the divine bounty? How wonderfully
 is dead nature accommodated to the uses of
 living things? And as the supreme Being,
 the creator of the world, has filled it with
 the fruits of his liberality, that which raises
 our idea of this principle in him as an object
 of

SERM. of affection, is, the freeness and disinterest-

X. edness of it. Every inferior agent depending
 on another for the preservation of his being
 and for his happiness, must be supposed to
 need something from without, and to have
 particular desires which ultimately terminate
 in himself. But how can we conceive of any
 other spring of action than benevolence in
 the absolutely self-sufficient and independent
 being? There is therefore none good but one,
 that is God, none essentially and immutably
 good, none besides him who acts always solely
 from that principle. Here is goodness in per-
 fection, which must appear amiable to every
 mind that bears any resemblance of it, and
 be the subject of delightful meditation.

If these are our apprehensions concerning
 the Deity, one can hardly conceive what
 should stop the course of our love to him. It
 is true, there are other parts of his character,
 (to be afterwards observed,) which when com-
 pared with our own, may damp our hopes
 from him, and produce fear. But since even
 imperfect kind dispositions necessarily attract
 our affection, the idea of perfect supreme
 goodness, (abstracting from all other consid-
 erations,) would seem to be an object which
 must have irresistible charms for the human
 heart; and that we should not be able to con-
 sider

sider it without a sensible pleasure. It may SERM.
therefore justly be feared, that as some men's X.
habitual impreffions of God, (particularly in
their devotion,) have more of a joyless awe, and
servile dread, than a delightful complacency,
this proceeds from their misrepresenting him
to themselves, as a being who acts towards
his creatures merely in the way of arbitrary
dominion, appointing them to happiness or
misery only because he will. Whereas the
true notion of infinite goodness, directed in
its exercise by the most perfect wisdom, and
having always for its object the greatest and
most extensive happiness, would inspire the
mind with sentiments of ingenuous gratitude,
and thereby be the best security of our sincere
obedience. At the same time, there is no rea-
son to allege that the tendency of this is to
encourage a presumptuous confidence in sin-
ners, as imagining they may go on securely in
their trespasses with hopes of impunity; (which
can only proceed from a wretched depravity
of heart, and a wrong notion of the divine
goodness, as if it were a blind undistinguish-
ing proneness to the communication of hap-
piness;) for besides that every considerate per-
son must see that supreme goodness itself has
established an inviolable connexion between
virtue and felicity, the true sense of that glo-
rious

SERMONIOUS and amiable perfection, even naturally
 X. and immediately begets an inward shame and
 remorse for having dishonoured it, and some
 degree of hope is absolutely necessary to repentance.

But let us consider ourselves as the particular objects of the divine favour,—That whatever good we possess of any kind, whatever excellence we are conscious of in the frame of our nature, and its pre-eminence above other kinds of creatures in the world about us,—That largeness of understanding whereby we are entertained with an infinite diversity of objects,—Those natural affections which yield us a great variety of pleasure,—our moral capacities and improvements which are accompanied with a high sense of worth, The privileges of our condition, That provision which is made for our easy enjoyment of life, whether by the means of our own invention and industry, and the assistance of our fellow creatures or without them,—and The greater happiness we hope for hereafter,—All these and all other good things, however convey'd, are originally owing to the bounty of God. Now the affection of gratitude is so natural to the mind of man, that we shall scarcely allow him to be reckoned one of the species who is altogether void of it; at least, to be ungrateful

ful is universally accounted one of the most SERM.
abandoned and profligate characters. But X.

surely this principle ought to operate most vigorously towards the greatest beneficence; and there is none that may be compared with that which God has shewn to us. Shall we be much affected with the kindness of our fellow creatures, and disposed to make thankful acknowledgments for their favours? And shall we be insensible of that goodness to which we owe our being and our very capacity of happiness, as well as the materials of it? This is the noblest object of human affection, in which the mind, firmly persuaded and steddily contemplating it, rests fully satisfied. And though the exercise and manifestation of this divine principle towards ourselves, gives us the most convincing proof of it, and a very lively sense of its amiable excellence, yet does not the affection ultimately terminate in our own happiness, so that we should be justly said to love God for our own sakes, but in supreme Goodness itself, which must appear the most complete and worthy object of love to every intelligent and moral being whose judgment is not misled by prejudices or inattention, and which is not deeply corrupted in its moral affections.

Thirdly,

SERM. Thirdly, we may consider the intire moral
X. character of the Deity. All his moral attributes may be summed up in goodness, which is probably the justest way we can conceive of them as active principles in him. Perhaps in inferior characters benevolence may be rightly called the sum of virtue ; but of the supreme independent Being we cannot think more becomingly than that this solely is this spring of his actions. Yet considering the variety of its exercise according to the different condition of rational creatures, and how variously individuals are affected with those very measures which they steddily pursue as their great end (the universal good,) hence arises a diversity in our conceptions concerning that most simple uniform principle which is without variableness or shadow of turning. We know how to distinguish in imperfect human characters between the righteous and the good : The last is the finishing quality, yet others are necessary : And applying this to God, we have somewhat different notions of his goodness abstractly considered, and of the rectitude or holiness of his nature, his justice, and his truth ; all which in conjunction with unchangeable goodness make up his true moral character, and are the intire object of our affection.

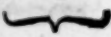
Now,

Now, let any man calmly consider how S E R M.
his mind is affected towards these qualities in X.
a limited degree of perfection. Let him try
what a difference his heart naturally makes
between the generous patriot, the faithful
friend, the inflexibly righteous judge, the
kind benefactor, and the directly opposite
characters as they are represented in history.
Whether the one does not necessarily attract
his veneration and esteem, and the other be-
get his contempt and aversion, tho' they are
supposed to be at the remotest distance from
his personal knowledge, and without a possi-
bility of having any effect on his own interest.
Let him place these contrary objects in a
nearer point of view, applying the characters
so far as they may be justly applied within
his particular acquaintance; (for the condition
of the world is not at any time either so good
or so bad, but that this distinction is manifest;) }
still it will evidently appear that the righte-
ous is more excellent than his neighbour; and
that unblemished integrity, with all the pub-
lic and private virtues, command a peculiar
respect, shining through all the obscurity
which superstition and a party spirit have been
able to throw upon them, and still as the mo-
ral character rises in perfection, our esteem for
it proportionably increases.

But

SERM. But let us suppose a being of the most perfect rectitude, goodness, and all other moral excellencies, in the nearest situation, and most intimately related to ourselves;—That there is a constant intercourse between him and us,—We have daily opportunities of observing his conduct, the manifestations of his amiable attributes, and on the other hand, our behaviour is continually in his view.—That we have received innumerable benefits, indeed our all from his bounty, and constantly depend upon him for every thing we need;—That he is our supreme immediate governor, and that our present and future state, with all the changes in them, are absolutely under his disposal; Surely we cannot doubt but this Being is the proper object of our highest affection. And if far inferior degrees of moral goodness in our fellow-creatures necessarily attract veneration and esteem, (even though beheld at a distance,) and our interest is not concerned in the effects of it; such absolute perfection placed in the strongest point of light, being exerted upon ourselves, must raise in every attentive mind a superlative reverence and love.

But let us observe the natural workings of the human heart towards such a perfect moral character, so manifested, and falling within our knowledge, whereby we shall understand

stand the genuine operations of the love of SERM.
God, and be able to discern them in our own X
minds. First, it is accompanied with a de-


fire of imitation. Since we ourselves are in-
duced with a moral capacity, it seems to be
utterly inconsistent, and what human nature
is not capable of, that moral excellence should
be an object of affectionate esteem, yet with-
out a desire of resembling it. Let any man
fix his attention to the amiable ideas of ho-
nesty, justice, mercy, and fidelity, as exem-
plified in a particular moral agent well known
to him, and try whether he does not find se-
cret earnest wishes in his own soul, that he
were possessed of the same qualities? Indeed
this principle seems to have a very great influ-
ence on the generality of mankind, whose
tempers and behaviour are in a great measure
formed by example, never without the ap-
pearance of some moral species to recommend
it; and it is the great practical principle of
religion. For, according to men's notions of
the Deity, so are their dispositions and their
moral conduct; of which the history of all
ages, and all religions, afford us very plain
instances. Just sentiments concerning the
supreme Being, as perfectly holy, righteous,
and good, naturally tend to produce, and
when seriously considered with hearty and

SERM. pure affection, actually have produced the like

X. { tempers and manners in men, carrying human virtue to its greatest height of perfection; whereas the erroneous opinions of many concerning the dispositions of their Gods, (still retaining an idea of their dominion,) have, above all things, corrupted their morals by the desire of imitation, and added the strongest sanction to their vices. Such is the force and the natural operation of love to moral agents, those especially who are supposed to be in a superior condition, and above all, the acknowledged object of religious respect. And by this clear evidence we may try the sincerity of our professed love to the true God; nor can any attentive mind that would not wilfully deceive itself, be at a loss in judging by these plain scripture rules, * *Be ye followers of God as dear children. † And if ye call on the father, who without respect of persons judgeth all men, be ye holy in all manner of conversation, as he who hath called you is holy.*

Secondly, sincere love to the Deity, considered as a being of the most perfect moral character, with whom we have to do in such a variety of important relations, and in whose presence we are continually, is always accompanied with an earnest desire of his approbation. If

* Eph. v. 1.

† 1 Pet. i. 17—15.

If we look carefully into our own hearts, SERM.
we shall find that this never is, nor can be X.
separated from an affectionate esteem; and
that the love of any person naturally directs
us to form our conduct to his liking, and
make it our constant study to please him. So
it is in inferior instances; children make it
their principal endeavour to please their pa-
rents, servants their masters, and subjects
their sovereigns; not only so, but they who
live together upon terms of the most perfect
equality, are determined by their social af-
fections, to render themselves agreeable to
each other. It is thus that the desire of ho-
nour, and the fear of disgrace, (powerful prin-
ciples of action in the human nature,) are to
be accounted for: Our mutual affections
strongly engage us to seek mutual esteem;
and while we love mankind, it is impossible
to be wholly indifferent whether we have
their approbation or not. But as this prin-
ciple makes a distinction among men, (for a
well-disposed mind values the approbation of
others in proportion to their wisdom and vir-
tue,) so it operates in the same manner to-
wards beings of different orders. Intelligent
agents of other species are the objects of our
esteem as well as mankind; and if we sup-
pose ourselves under their observation, it will

SERM. naturally be our desire to approve our conduct
X. to them according to the degree of their apprehended wisdom and superior moral excellence. Especially the sincere love of that being who is so intimately present with us as to know the secrets of our hearts, and who is unparallel'd in all moral perfections, our gracious father, guardian, and governor, will determine us to make it the principal aim of our lives, and of all our deliberate designs and actions, that we may be approved of him. If therefore God has made his will known to us; if he has directed us after what manner we shall act so as to please him, our obedience is the natural expression of our love to him, and in vain shall we pretend to have that affection in our hearts, while we do not keep his commandments. But every man has the work of the divine law written in his heart. By a fair and unprejudiced attention to the first dictates of his own mind upon every question relating to his moral conduct, (without entering into perplexing debates, which generally take their rise from some degree of inward dishonesty, and tend to error rather than the knowledge of the truth,) he knows what will be acceptable to his great ruler and judge, so far as to assure his heart, and have confidence towards him; which by
the

the unalterable appointment of supreme good-NESS is the genuine result of integrity in all good affections, comprehended in loving the Lord our God, with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. S E R M. X.

The same practical principle of love to God, which is manifested by obedience to his precepts as its inseparable effect, will also produce an absolute submission to the appointments of his providence, with intire confidence in him. For if we have habitually upon our minds an affectionate sense of his supreme dominion, exercised with the most perfect wisdom, and constantly and invariably pursuing, as its chief end, the greatest good, what can follow more naturally than that we should be satisfied in all events, and wholly resigned to his will? These two, a sincere uniform disposition exerted in practice to keep his commandments, and a chearful unrepining submission to his providence, constitute that temper of mind in which true piety consists, and which is the perpetual source of inward serenity and joy. So far as we deviate from them, and are conscious of rebellious inclinations and of unsubmitive discontent, misgiving fears arise in our minds of his disapprobation; because then it appears that we are not made perfect in love, for love made

SERM. perfect by the fruits of obedience and resignation, only, *casts out fear.*

X.

The supreme Being, whose glorious character justly claims our highest affection and most devout regards, is not indeed intuitively discerned by us; he is not the immediate object either of our external or internal senses. * *Behold (says Job) I go forward but he is not there, (visible) and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him.* It is by our reason we are convinced of his existence and his perfections. But if we are thoroughly convinced; and if his being, as he is in himself absolutely perfect, righteous, and good, be the real object of our understandings, nature directs the exercise of our affections to him; which do not wholly depend on our manner of apprehending their objects, but our persuasion concerning the reality of them. Suppose a person of eminent worth in a situation remote from our acquaintance, and we have no other knowledge of his being and virtues than we have of other distant facts; —This character will attract our veneration, tho' it may not affect our minds so sensibly as immediate conversation would do. And suppose

* Job xxiii. 8, 9.

pose us to have only rational, not sensible evidence, that a friend is so near as to remark our words and actions, we should surely have a regard to his presence suitable to our esteem of his character. In like manner, if we believe that the invisible God is intimately present with us, that in him we live and move and have our being, and that he is acquainted, not only with our outward actions, but our most secret thoughts,—What can be more rational than that we should form our conduct with an eye to his approbation? That we should *walk before him*, (as the scripture expresses a religious course of life) and be *perfect*, that is, sincerely righteous and good as *he is*; this, one would think, must be inseparable from a firm persuasion, and a high esteem of his absolutely perfect moral character.

There may be, and very probably will be an intirely different manner of apprehending the divine Being and perfections in the future state. There is no difficulty in conceiving that the human mind may have faculties and ways of perceiving objects wholly new, and of which we can now form no idea, as we know that various intelligent creatures are endued with various capacities, whereby are conveyed to them ideas peculiar to themselves. Why may we not suppose that the supreme Being

SERM. himself, and his glorious attributes, shall be
 X. the immediate object of the mind's intuition,
 discerned not by the distant and unaffecting
 way of reasoning from effects to their causes,
 but as clearly and directly as we now perceive
 the objects of sense, or even our own powers
 and operations ; which the sacred writers de-
 scribe by *seeing him face to face*, and *knowing*
as we are known, and illustrate the superior
 excellence of it above our present manner of
 conceiving the sublime subject, by an allusion
 to the difference between the knowledge of
 children and of grown men. The affections
 then will operate according to the clearer views
 of the understanding, in a manner of which
 we have not now a distinct notion. But since
 we find by experience that sensible things,
 (low as they are in their nature, and of little
 importance to the main ends of our being, yet)
 do by their immediate presence, and the
 strong impression they make upon our minds,
 excite vehement desires, and raise sensations
 of pleasure, which the cool and rational con-
 sideration of the same objects could never pro-
 duce ; and moral qualities, even imperfect in
 their kind, and but imperfectly understood,
 yet attract very intense affection, and are con-
 templated with great delight ;—we must con-
 clude that infinite power, wisdom, and good-
 ness,

ness, in conjunction, (which gave birth to the universe, and is the sole cause of all created being, and all felicity, seen not darkly and through a glass, but shining upon the soul in its full unclouded splendor,) will fill it with joy unspeakable and full of glory, be the adequate object of its highest affections, the center of rest, its last end, and most complete happiness.

In the mean time, obscure knowledge, cold and languid affections, and imperfect enjoyment, belong to our present state of probation and discipline, through which we are passing to a more exalted condition of existence. Our business therefore is, without repining at the appointments of providence, to improve the capacities and advantages we now enjoy, so as the proper end of them may be attained. Particularly, since our knowledge of God is not by intuition, but by reflection and reasoning, which are the proper exercises of our own powers, we ought to employ ourselves actively in them. We know that the mind can turn its thoughts and attention to particular objects, and use other means which by observation and experience appear conducive to its improvement in the knowledge of them. In the present case, this seems to be the principal duty which the supreme Being

SERM.
X.

SER M. Being requires of us. For since by the consti-

X. tution of our nature, we have affections which will of themselves arise towards him when known; and since we are endued with a capacity, and furnished with the means of knowing, rather than with the actual knowledge of him; the most obvious obligation on creatures in such a state, and the most important part of their trial is, to improve that capacity by deliberate attention and reasoning, and to apply themselves diligently to the use of those means.

It follows, that the exercise of sincere piety, all summ'd up in the love of God, is always proportionable to our clear and distinct perceptions of his nature and attributes, in a rational way; and therefore it is necessary to religion that we preserve the free and undisturbed use of our intellectual powers. Our affections to other objects are excited by sense without consideration. The imagination, which often misleads the judgment, heightens their fervour; and the passions which violently agitate the soul, (and always need to be restrained rather than inflamed,) seem, in their original intention and within their proper bounds, rather designed to serve the purposes of the animal life and our condition in this world, than the sublime exercises of the

the mind, and the highest ends of our being: S E R M.
But true devotion, which is wholly founded X.
in the understanding, always keeps pace with
its calm and deliberate exercise; and the rule
by which we ought to judge of its sincerity,
is not extatic rapture and vehement emotion
of mind, but a constant resignation to the
will of God, and a steady purpose of approv-
ing ourselves to him in the whole course of
our actions; *for this is the love of God, that
we keep his Commandments.*

S E R-

SERMON XI.

Of Trust in GOD, and Praying to him.

Pfal. lxii. 8.

Trust in him at all Times ye People, pour out your Heart before him.

SERM.
XI.

AS all the creatures derive their being, and whatever degree of power, perfection, and happiness they possess, from the goodness of God, (the sole principle which, we can conceive, could determine him, infinitely perfect and self-sufficient, to create any thing;) so the continuance of their being, and every degree of created power, perfection and happiness, depends solely on his good pleasure. For it is impossible that such an effect should not depend absolutely on the cause; that any thing which exists merely by the will of another, should not exist just so long as, and cease to exist whenever that other, pleases; and that all the circumstances of
of

of its condition, ordered by his free appointment, should not be always subject to his disposal. The rational creatures whom God has indued with a capacity of discerning this, will find, that as, when they seriously and deliberately attend to it, the affection of gratitude will naturally arise in their minds for the favours they have received, so with respect to futurity, (to which they cannot help looking with an earnest and solicitous expectation,) they have no solid ground of inward tranquillity and hope, but in an affectionate reliance on the same immutable divine bounty, to which they owe their being and all the good already in their possession. This then, as well as love, is an eminent branch of that natural homage which intelligent creatures owe to the Deity. Especially we, who find ourselves in an imperfect and indigent state; having weaknesses in every part of our constitution; frail bodies and feeble minds; narrow understandings, vexatious desires and perplexing fears; who are always liable to changes, to pains and troubles of various kinds, and the whole of our condition here but a kind of infancy of being, naturally capable of being raised to a much higher degree of perfection hereafter, and capable likewise of a change for the worse, when this state

of

S E R M. of probation and discipline is over, (for of

XI. that future existence there is at least a high probability, which must sensibly affect an attentive mind,) we, I say, who find ourselves in this situation ; whose all is in God's hands and depends on his pleasure ; who have so little in actual possession, and so much in prospect ;—we especially, live by faith in God ; and it is a most important part of our duty, as well as the only sure foundation of inward peace and security of mind, to *trust in him at all times.*

I will endeavour in this discourse to explain confidence in God, by shewing the true principles on which it rests, together with the sentiments and dispositions imported in it ; and then, I will consider what the Psalmist recommends in pursuance of it, namely, pouring out our hearts before him, or praying to him.

To trust in any person or intelligent agent, is to expect good from his benevolence or kind affections. In order to which there must not only be a persuasion of his good dispositions, but of his power as superior to ours, at least as sufficient for affecting something to our advantage, which we could not effect without him, and of his knowledge and wisdom extending to the affairs wherein

we

we trust him. The least attention will satisfy us, that the knowledge of all these qualifications in the agent is necessary to lay a foundation for our confidence. If a person in power is ill disposed towards us, we dread him in proportion to the apprehensions we have of his power; if he is indifferent, there may be fear, but very little hope; if we are secure of any one's good will, but believe him to be weak or ignorant, this may give some pleasure, yet no expectation of advantage; but kindness in conjunction with ability and wisdom make the complete character which is the object of confidence. Now all these properties belong to the Deity in an infinite degree of perfection. As with the *Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength*, a power extending to the utmost bounds of possibility, to do in heaven and earth whatsoever pleases him; and unlimited knowledge comprehending all things, with all their circumstances and relations, nay, and all future events; so *he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*. That variety of happiness which there is in the world, and can be attributed to no other cause than his good pleasure, abundantly prove this. There is provision made for all the kinds of living creatures which we see in the earth, the air, and the

SERM.

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SER M. the waters ; their infinitely various necessities

XI. are supplied, and they have enjoyments suitable to their several capacities and desires : The human constitution carries the plainest marks of its author's goodness, and so does the daily care which providence takes of mankind. These things must convince every considerate mind that the maker and disposer of all things is a most benevolent Being, indeed, deserves to be called supreme goodness itself. This being the general and most evidently demonstrated character of the Deity, it must be manifested towards every proper object ; that is, all who need and are capable of receiving any good from him. For it is utterly unworthy of, and inconsistent with supreme goodness, to be partial or capricious in its exercise, to be beneficent to one, or to some, and not to others, who are in parallel circumstances of want, and equally capable of receiving. Every man who seriously reflects on the whole of his own state, will find himself such a monument of the divine liberality and paternal care, that he will be thereby encouraged to depend on the bounty of providence for the future. The Apostle *Peter* therefore, justly exhorts christians in a suffering condition, * *to commit the keeping* of

* 1 Peter iv. 19.

and praying to him.

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of their souls to God as unto a faithful creator. S E R M.

His having made us, not we ourselves, to which nothing can be supposed to have moved him but his own goodness, is a reasonable foundation of hope in him, for *he has a desire to the work of his hands.* XI.

But the goodness of God extending to all his creatures, and being so exercised towards every one as not to neglect any, the whole system is at once the object of his care; which comprehending a vast variety of individuals, the good of many, and indeed of the whole, may be attended with particular inconveniencies to some. This, we know, is in fact the case of human governments; the end of which being the benefit of intire societies put under their care, and of every single subject so far only as it is consistent with that, they necessarily and laudably pursue the measures which tend to the common safety, though the interfering interests of a few may suffer by them. Who would reproach a prince for destroying the properties or the lives of a few subjects, suppose rebels or traitors, when the interest of the whole kingdom indispensably requires it? This is so far from being any just ground of impeaching his goodness, that goodness itself, directed by wisdom, is the very motive to it. From this low and im-

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perfect

SERM. perfect image we may take our rise to the

XI. consideration of the divine universal government, the true character whereof is supreme goodness, which being conducted by the most perfect wisdom, steddily and constantly pursues as its end the good of the whole, that is, the universal happiness of intelligent beings; though in a perfect consistency with that, nay, as absolutely necessary to it, some individuals may suffer. It is impossible indeed for a finite understanding to discern all the relations of things, and to see their remotest issues, which are fully known to infinite wisdom; and therefore it is impossible for us to comprehend the whole of the divine administration, and to discern the goodness of it in some particular instances which to our narrow minds may have a contrary appearance, when some of his creatures suffer by his appointment. But this does not proceed from a defect of benevolence towards any of them, but from the abundance of it towards the whole, which always intends, and being joined with infinite power and wisdom, irresistibly effects the most extensive good. For I think it must appear a most evident truth, that a Being who is infinitely good, at the same time so powerful as to do whatever he pleases, (nothing can resist him,) and

and so wise as to have all possible connexions, SERM.
dependencies, and events of things at once XI.
in his view, that, I say, such a being always
does what is best in the whole.

This is the first principle upon which our trusting in God rests, that he is infinitely good, wise, and powerful; and his whole conduct is suitable to that character, that is, he always pursues, as the end of his actions, the greatest absolute good; and the sentiments and dispositions agreeable to it which our confidence in him imports, are, that our minds should be fully satisfied with the divine administration, and make that good which is its ultimate end, the matter of our joyful hope. It is true, this does not ascertain to us the fulfilling and gratifying our own particular desires; nor is the object of hope, in this view, private happiness, as separated from the order of the world and the common good of intelligent beings; yet this, the greatest good, is the fit object of earnest desire, and the prospect of it gives pleasure, with a high esteem of the person by whom it is accomplished, which are the principal affections included in trust, as we are now considering it. Would not a wise and good man earnestly desire, and joyfully hope for the common safety and happi-

SERM. nefs of his country; and make the person
 XI. from whose favour and prudence it was to be
 expected, the object of his trust, though his
 own private interest were only attended to
 in subordination to the public utility? For
 there are public affections planted in the hu-
 man mind, as well as self-love; and it is not
 only the gratifying of the latter, but the for-
 mer, that yields true enjoyment. Now we
 are members not of a particular society only,
 but of the whole moral world; of God's
 great family in heaven and earth; and this
 should give us the greatest delight, and we
 ought to acquiesce in it with the highest satis-
 faction and contentedness of mind, that he is
 at the head of the universe, superintending
 all affairs, and directing them so, as effec-
 tually to promote the greatest good of the
 intire intelligent system. * *The Lord reign-*
eth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of
the isles be glad thereof. † *The world shall be*
established, that it shall not be moved. ‡ *He*
is the confidence of all the ends of the earth,
and of them that are afar off on the sea. And
 if he be the common confidence of all his
 creatures, it can only be understood in this sense,
 —not that he takes care of every individual
 separately, and independently on the rest, as
 if

* Psal. xvii. 1.

† Psal. xciii. 1.

‡ Psal. lxxv. 5.

if it were the sole object of his attention, but S E R M.
that having every one in the view of his all- XI.
comprehending mind, he promotes the good
of the universal system, and communicates
the greatest measure of happiness to the whole,
which he certainly and invariably does; and
a well-disposed mind rejoices in it. This is
what our hearts, when we calmly reflect on
it, must necessarily approve, as in itself rea-
sonable, and most worthy of God, the wise
and good governor of the world. We should
certainly think it becoming the father of a
family, or the ruler of a civil society, to em-
ploy his care for the benefit of the whole,
and not confine it to a few favourites, neg-
lecting the rest; and shall we not be fully
satisfied with the same conduct of the Deity,
the great parent of the universe? Thus far
then, and with these dispositions, we, and
all reasonable creatures may and ought to
trust in God.

The second principle is, that in the go-
vernment of his reasonable creatures, God has
a regard to their moral dispositions and be-
haviour; and that there is by his appoint-
ment a certain established connexion between
happiness and virtue. He is a lover of recti-
tude, and hates vice; a perfectly holy being
himself, free from every kind and degree of

SERM. moral evil ; *a God of truth, and without ini-*

XI. *quity, just and right is he ;* and he approves righteousness and goodness wherever it is found, and will reward it ; but wickedness is an abomination to him. I will not now enter on the proof of a truth, which has been before insisted on, and must appear so evident to every man who has employed his mind in the consideration of it ; and which by all who have any regard to religion, must be acknowledged to be its main foundation. There may be difference in opinions concerning this point, if we confine our thoughts to the present state of things ; and it may be a question, Whether in this world virtue be its own reward ? Though, I think, even in that view, the evidence is on the side of virtue ; and God has not in any part of his administration left himself without witness of its excellency and eligibleness, and of his approving it. But if we take in the whole of men's existence, and of the divine government over them, all that are not atheists must agree, that to be good is the sure way to be happy ; and that, sooner or later, God will reward all those that diligently seek him. Indeed, as our state here is imperfect in virtue, so it is in happiness. Not that in all respects there is between these two an exact propor-

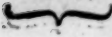
proportion; that is, we do not find in experience, that the outward condition of men is easy and prosperous according to the measure of their real worth. The contrary is apparent; for sometimes, as the prophet speaks, * *the proud are called happy, yea they that work wickedness are set up, yea they that tempt God are even delivered*; which often proves a snare to bad men, and a strong temptation to the good. But, not to speak of the counter-balance on the side of innocence and integrity in inward self-enjoyment and the approbation of conscience, (a greater and more substantial felicity than any outward state in this world can afford, and such peace is only the effect of righteousness, and the fruit of it is quietness and assurance for ever;) besides this, I say, it is to be considered, that the external state of things here, as irregular as it seems to be, and unfavourable to virtue, is yet under the direction of the divine providence. God does not leave the world to chance, or to the arbitrary will of inferior agents: He continually presides over them all, and by his own interposition orders the whole series of events, adjusting them so as to answer the ends of his moral government. The true answer, therefore, to all the difficul-

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ties

* Matt. iii. 15.

SERM. ties arising from the dispensations of provi-

XI.  dence, and the objections taken from the prosperity of the wicked and the calamities of good men, against the equity and goodness of the divine administration, its impartial regard to virtue, and therefore against the reasonableness of trusting in the Lord at all times,—The answer, I say, is furnished by these considerations;—That this is a state of probation;—that it is in love God chastens his children, and for their profit;—that he appoints afflictions and trials to men, particularly to his most faithful servants, to humble and prove them, and do them good in their latter end; that the most illustrious exercise of virtue is occasioned by these trials, and so good is brought out of evil, to the praise of the divine goodness and wisdom;—that God very often interposes by his providence to deliver the righteous out of their troubles, and at length he will deliver them out of them all; and therefore, finally, that the partial and temporary sufferings of good men are no argument against God's having a regard, in his government, to the natural dispositions and behaviour of his reasonable creatures, and his having established a connexion between happiness and virtue.

Hence

Hence it follows, that with respect to our-
selves and our own happiness, our confidence
in God ought to be directed by a regard to
his character as the wise moral governor of
the world, and therefore implies a conformity
to his laws ; we may entertain high expectations from his goodness, and rely upon his
favour, only upon occasion of the sincere and
faithful performance of our duty, and imitating his holiness. Since, by the established
rules of his administration, the happiness of
moral agents is inseparably connected with
virtue, what reasonable prospect can there be
of the former without the testimony of our
own consciences concerning our sincerity in
the other ? The sacred writers, agreeable to
the first principles of natural religion, thus
limit our trust in God. They represent it as
having a necessary connexion with doing
good ; they exhort them *that fear the Lord
to trust in him ; for he is their help and shield ;
and him that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth
the voice of his servant, although he walk in
darkness and hath no light, yet to trust in the
name of the Lord, and to stay upon his God.*
The deepest distress, and most dismal con-
juncture of afflicting circumstances ought
not to weaken our confidence in the divine
mercy, (provided always that our minds be
sup-

SERM. supported by an inward consciousness of integrity,) But when the hearts of men reproach them for their crimes, and they have the galling remembrance of guilt unrepented of, this naturally produces distrust. In this case to expect the approbation of God, and such favour as he shews to his sincere servants, is presumptuously to affront the judge of the whole earth, as supposing him not to do right; that he is a party to the wickedness of his creatures, and will indulge them in it. Which is not to be understood in so strict a sense, as if a consciousness of the least moral imperfection did destroy our hopes in God: For if he should enter into judgment with his servants, and strictly mark all their failures, no man living could be justified in his sight. But when our hearts do not condemn us for willfully indulging ourselves in any evil way, or for any deliberate transgression of God's law unrepented of and unreformed, or *committing sin so as to be the servants of sin*; on the contrary, they witness an habitual sincerity of intention and integrity of life, though not without some defects in the performance of our duty, and some infirmities (which strictly speaking, may be called sinful, but not to be wholly avoided by any mortal in this imperfect state,) and we are always

ways watching against them, and endeavouring to amend them; Then we have confidence towards God, believing that as the righteous and good judge, he will make a difference between such a character, and impenitent workers of iniquity, of which christianity gives us a full and express assurance.

If men will form their desires and hopes of happiness wholly by sense, and by the present external appearance of things, the favour of God will be little in their esteem, far from being acknowledged a sufficient portion. For as he is himself invisible, the distinguishing effects of his loving kindness are not the object of outward observation; but to the mind which believes his being, and that he is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him, things appear in a quite different light. There is an important reality in the divine approbation which will some time or other produce great and substantial effects, consummating the felicity of the human nature; and the expectation of them, is a mighty support to the mind against present griefs and fears. For inferior enjoyments in this life, (of which there is a great variety,) all of them the fruits of the divine bounty, but dispensed promiscuously to

SERM.
XI.

SERM. to outward appearance, yet under the direction of wise providence ; none of them ascertained to particular persons, nor annexed to any peculiar moral character ; for them, I say, a religious confidence ought always to be accompanied with submission to the sovereign and gracious will of God, for this reason, because we *know not what is good for us all the days of this vain life which passeth as a shadow* ; but he is the perfect judge, and therefore it should be referred intirely to him ; which the heart conscious of its own integrity may do with full satisfaction, secure of that truth which the *Psalmist* declares, * *that the Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will be withhold from them that walk uprightly.* Upon which he adds, in the following words, *O Lord of hosts blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.* No man can rationally assure himself of particular future events in this world (which depend on the sovereign counsels of God and are known only to him,) of particular enjoyments to be obtained, or dangers to be avoided ; because we cannot be sure that such particular events are for the best, or have a necessary connexion with our own greatest happiness ; which is all that our confidence ought

* Psal. lxxxiv. 11, 12.

ought regularly to terminate upon. It is SERM.
 enough * *that there is no want to them that* XI.
fear God: the young lions lack and suffer hun-
ger, but they that seek the Lord shall not lack
any good thing, that is, which God infinitely
 wise, as well as kind and compassionate,
 knows to be good for them, and necessary to
 their greatest happiness.

The regular and religious confidence in
 God which I have explained, ought to have,
 and indeed is naturally apt to produce this
 effect in the minds of good men, to establish
 them, and preserve an inward tranquillity
 and peace, free from those vexing disquiet-
 ing passions, those tormenting and over-
 whelming *sorrows of the world that work*
death, and those dispiriting fears and dis-
 couragements which are the most unhappy
 as well as undutiful state we can be in. And
 therefore not only with respect to the other
 world, when the full reward shall be enjoy-
 ed, and the end of faith completely obtain-
 ed, (which is the salvation of the soul,) but
 even with respect to this life, they may be
 pronounced truly blessed who put their trust
 in God. For having a firm well-grounded
 persuasion of all the great principles of reli-
 gion, particularly of the perfect felicity re-
 served

* Psal. xxxiv. 9, 10.

SERM. served for the righteous hereafter, which they

XI. themselves hope for from the testimony of
 their own consciences concerning their sincerity; and acquiescing with pleasure in that order and disposition of things which the wise and good governor of the world has appointed as the best, (however uneasy some events may be to themselves for a time,) they enjoy stable equanimity in all the vicissitudes of time, and possess their souls in patience without outrageous impotent anger or gnawing discontent. This happy fruit of trusting in God, the prophet *Isaiah* mentions :
** Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.* And thus the devout *Psalmist* reasons with himself against the immoderate griefs and the distracting fears of his own mind :
† Why art thou cast down, O my soul, why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise him who is the health of thy countenance and thy God. Or, as the same pious author more generally speaks concerning the good man : *‡ He shall not be afraid of evil tidings ; his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord, his heart is established, surely he shall not be moved for ever.*

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* Isa. xxvi. 3. † Psal. xlii. 5. 11. ‡ Psal. cxii. 10.

It remains now only, to the end we may S E R M.
see the full effect of confidence in God, that XI.

we consider the influence which it has upon the principles of human action. Considering the life of man as a pursuit of his interest, not yet fully possessed or secured, (which is a very comprehensive, I do not say, a complete view of it;) there must be some evidence of futurity to excite and direct the active principles in our nature: Every one knows by experience, that it is this, in some degree or other, which does set him at work, and engage his affections. Now, abstracting from the notion of ruling intelligence in the world, disposing all events, there seems to arise some probability from the common established course of things, or what we usually call the general laws of nature, such as—the interchangeable variation of the seasons;—the fertility of the earth;—the ordinary necessities and conveniencies of mankind provided for by human art and industry;—the maxims whereby they conduct themselves towards each other founded on social affections, equity, fidelity, and benevolence, (principles which have a considerable influence on their mutual communication, though the operation of them is but imperfect in its degree, and not universal;) upon which observations of fact, and others

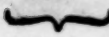
of

SERM. of a parallel nature, men form their particular

XI. scheme, every one for his own interest; but the probability is often very low. This general course of things, as applied by particular persons in the direction of their measures, being subject to great uncertainties, and especially the continuance of life; on which they all depend, yet it is sufficient to animate men in their pursuits; it actually does so, and reasonably, since no higher evidence can be attained. But if we alter the supposition, and consider a benevolent being, infinitely powerful and perfectly wise, presiding over the world and directing its course, whose care extends to every individual creature, and who orders the minutest circumstances of things, with all the consequences of them; there arises in the mind an affectionate confidence, not a certainty with respect to particular events which God has reserved to himself, giving us no other evidence than the probability already mentioned; but it adds cheerfulness and vigour to the heart in acting, as well as fills it with reverence, to know that we are under the observation and the guidance of a perfectly righteous, wise and good being, who orders all things for the best in the whole, and makes all things work together for good to them that love him. As to the hopes of men engaged

engaged in the affairs of life, the object of S E R M. which hope is future good, we must distin- XI. guish between the immediate view, that is, the expectation of success directly aimed at by the means used, (suppose the acquisition of riches, honour, or any other temporal advantage,) we must, I say, distinguish between this and the ultimate design, which is happiness. The former rests on the one common foundation of prudence and industry, * as *Solomon* observes, *all things here come alike to all*; they have no necessary connexion with any moral character, nor are ascertained by trusting in the Lord: *There is one event to the righteous and the wicked.* But the other more remote intention of happiness in general, which every man aims at, and which does not depend on particular events, is sure only to them who sincerely fear God, who keep his commandments, and confidently rely on his goodness.

I proceed now to consider the duty of prayer, which being principally intended as an expression of confidence in God, the explication of it will be a proper sequel of what has been already said. All nations of men whom God has made to dwell upon the earth, have constantly agreed in acknowledging that he is to be worshipped; and by the same ge-

SERM. neral consent, prayer appears to be one act of
 XI.  homage which the indigent and frail condition of human nature has always directed them to pay him ; though many of them, (having grossly erred in their notions of the Deity and his attributes,) have dishonoured instead of glorifying him by their pretended services, which were unworthy of reasonable creatures to present, and unworthy of a pure spirit, the supreme infinitely powerful, wise, and good governor of the world, to accept. Particularly, there have been great mistakes concerning the nature and design of prayer, and the right manner of performing it, inso-much that this important part of worship has been turned, not only into a mere insignificance, but a perfect absurdity, by a mixture of ridiculous and immoral rites, at least tending to impiety, vice, and uncharitableness ; and by a most stupid inattention to the sentiments, the qualifications and dispositions of mind, with which our petitions should be address'd to the supreme Being ; which may be too plainly discerned even among some of those who have enjoyed the best opportunities of instruction. It may therefore be necessary to observe,

First, that the intention of prayer is not to inform God of any thing he was supposed to be

be before unacquainted with, which is the SERM. professed design of petitions to men. It is XI.

no affront to the understanding of the wisest mortal to avow the intention of representing to him what he did not know, since a finite mind cannot possibly comprehend all things: And particularly, the wants and desires of men are secrets in their own hearts which no one knows but *the spirit of man which is within him* until they are expressed. But God is omniscient; his understanding is infinite; he searcheth the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men; he is thoroughly acquainted with all our ways; * *not a word can be in our tongue but he knows it altogether, yea he understands our thoughts afar off.* Let it never be imagined then, that we pretend by prayer to tell God what was unknown to him, or to engage his attention. Such stupid notions the worshippers of idols may have; and the prophet *Elijah* in an elegant sarcastic way upbraids the priests of *Baal* with them;—† *cry aloud, for he is a God, either he is pursuing, or in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked.* One cannot conceive upon what other grounds than such absurd fancies of the Deity, the heathens used their foolish rites of invocation and their vain repetitions. The blessed author of christianity insinuates

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this,

* Psal. cxxxix.

† 1 Kings xvii. 27.

SERM. this, in warning his disciples against imitating
 XI. the manner of the heathens when they pray,
 for says he, * *they think they shall be heard for much speaking*: They have some such weak and irrational imagination, as if the Deity were to be roused out of a careless inattention, or called off from other affairs by loud cries and many words. So would not our Saviour have his followers to think concerning the God and Father whom they worship, and therefore not to pray with any such intention. He adds in the verse immediately following, *be not ye like unto them*; † let not the labour of your lips in a multiplicity of expressions, or the same often repeated, be your study, or the business of your prayers, as if you were to inform God of what he did not know, or persuade him and prevail upon him to take notice of you, which without that kind of importunity he would not do; for your Father knoweth what you have need of, before you ask him. We ought to have it expressly in our consideration when we pray, that God already knows all our wants, every circumstance in our condition, and every thought in our hearts.

Secondly, Is it the design of prayer to move the goodness of God, in this sense, to excite in him a compassion for us, or any of his

* Matth. vi. 7.

† Matth. vi. 8.

his creatures, which he had not before, and S E R M.
so induce him to alter his counsels, and do in XI.

compliance with our requests what otherwise he was not inclined to? This is the end, and often the event of earnest and importunate applications to men: Their bowels are moved by intreaties, and tender compassion is raised by an affectionate representation of a pitiable object: They are disposed to confer benefits to which they had no previous inclination, or prevailed with to abate of their severity against an offender; and instead of the resentment which they had conceived, to entertain sentiments of kindness. But tho' this be in men not only innocent but honest and praise worthy, yet it implies an imperfection; which let it be far from us to impute to the most glorious of all beings, who is absolutely perfect in his wisdom, and all the other excellencies of his nature, without variableness or shadow of turning. And tho' the common language of men, and even the scriptures represent the goodness of God in very strong expressions, by a resemblance to human pity; (for it is said that *his bowels are moved*, he is *afflicted in the afflictions of his creatures*, and *his repentings are kindled for them* :) These are figurative forms of speaking, not to be taken in a strict and proper sense, as if he were liable to any sudden

SERM. passions or emotions of mind which attend

XI.  pity in us, and to a change in his measures and his conduct by their influence, so as there should be any ground to expect such effects from prayer as there is among men, who often are induced by the supplications of others to alter their course, and take new resolutions. Known to the Lord are *all his works from the beginning; his counsel stands for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations*, being formed with perfect understanding and foresight, and not depending on variable events in time. God is indeed infinitely good; but goodness in him is not a passion, or a sudden indeliberate propension excited by external occasions, but a calm and dispassionate principle, directed always in its exercise by the highest reason, which appears to his all comprehending mind, and therefore immutable in its measures as is the reason and fitness of things.

Hence it appears that there is a great difference between prayer to God and prayers to men, in the meaning and design of them. The very intention of the latter is to persuade them to change their mind and their course of action: And if we were perfectly assured that their purposes were fixed with respect to the matter of our petitions, it would
be

be in vain to pray to them at all. But prayer to God is of quite another nature, since *he is of one mind and we cannot pretend to turn him*. It is to be understood in the same manner as trusting in him, being properly no more than an explicit declaration of it; that is, it should be our principal design in our prayers to express our firm belief, our hearty consent, and our assured hopes, that God will always do what is for the best in the whole, always what is most reasonable and fit to be done, and what tends to the greatest good and happiness of the whole system of intelligent beings, suitable to his character, of their wise and gracious father and ruler: And with respect to the case of individual moral agents, that he will constantly and universally observe the rule of connecting felicity with virtue; so that in proportion as men are penitent, sincere, pious, sober, and righteous, and charitable, they shall be happy sooner or later; and in proportion to their consciousness of these qualities in themselves, so is their confidence in his favour; and they by prayer express their expectations of good from him. It is not meant, however, that our prayers should be confined to what has been now mentioned: We may descend to a great many particulars in our addresses

SERMON. dresses to God, and as the scripture speaks *, in

XI. *every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make our requests known to him.*

But this is the general rule we should follow, and the design we should pursue, in that part of worship; which may be applied more particularly to those cases wherein God has made his will known, either by the light of nature and by just inference from his moral attributes, or by plain declarations of his word, which are intended to direct us in prayer as well as other duties. But certainly our prayers cannot be acceptable to God or successful, unless they be agreeable to his will; for this is the reasonable confidence we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us,; and if we know that he heareth us, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. It is by no means reasonable to think that we have an unbounded liberty to address the desires which proceed from our own irregular passions and corrupt affections as petitions to God, or that we can have any hopes of acceptance in doing so: Nor is it to be thought too great a restraint upon us that we should be thus limited: Since from the infinite perfections of God's nature we are assured, that what he wills, is not only in itself, and with respect to the

* Phil. iv, 6,

the intire state of things fittest to be done, (in S E R M. which therefore we ought to acquiesce,) but XI. best in particular for them that love him.

If it be alleged, that prayer thus explained seems to have very little meaning in it, and scarcely to answer any valuable purpose. What does it signify for us solemnly to desire that God may do what he pleases, or what his wisdom sees best and fittest, which we are sure he will do, whether we desire it or not? I think it is a very important meaning in prayer which has been mentioned, namely, that it expresses our confidence in God; our assured expectation, with a sincere consent on our part, that he will do what is best, and by the properest and most effectual means promote the greatest good; and that he will deal with every one of his reasonable creatures according to equity, that is, goodness and wisdom, making them happy in proportion to the measure of their virtue. Now, this carries in it the best sentiments we can have, and the best dispositions, the most dutiful to God, and which are the solid foundation of the truest present pleasure, and of lasting happiness hereafter. It is wise and it is useful to express these sentiments in prayer, whereby they are strengthened; and this duty, when sincerely performed, becomes an excellent

SERM. excellent means of virtue, which is its prin-

XI. cipal design. The vigorous exercise of good affections naturally tends to confirm and increase them; and a profession made in the presence of God, and solemnly addressed to him, lays the mind under a strict obligation to pursue the good inclinations and purposes it has declared. The great motives of religion and universal righteousness are taken from the consideration of God, of his perfections, of his intimate presence with us, of his providence directing all our affairs and governing the world with the most perfect equity, and of his being the righteous judge who will render to every man according to his works. Now, all these motives are supposed to be expressly in our thoughts when we call on the name of the Lord. And indeed considering how many things occur in the ordinary course of human life to divert our attention from them, so that they often slip out of our thoughts, it is necessary that on some special occasions, and in a stated solemn manner, they should be brought to our remembrance, which is done by prayer. Besides, if we pray with understanding for ourselves, or for others, the principal subject and aim of our petitions will be the attainment of religious integrity, as the true glory and perfection

perfection of our nature ; to have our minds S E R M.
 formed to the love of moral rectitude and XI.
 benevolence, and our ways directed to the
 practice of righteousness and goodness. No-
 thing appears so desirable to a well disposed
 mind : And as we are sure such desires are
 agreeable to the will of God, we may trust
 in him, that he will do whatever is necessary
 on his part, that we may be assisted in pro-
 secution of them. And tho' we should in
 every thing make our requests known to
 God, and descend in our supplications to the
 various events and affairs of life, yet as they
 are all capable of being directed by divine
 providence to the purposes of our improve-
 ment in knowledge and religious virtue, that
 ought to be our principal view in our pray-
 ers concerning them : By which means such
 prayers become useful for preserving our
 minds in the right temper ; and acceptable to
 God, because *we do not ask amiss, to consume*
the gifts of his bounty upon our lust, or for
 the gratification of our low and corrupt de-
 sires, but with an intention, in all events, to
 grow in piety and goodness, which we are
 assured God is well pleased with, and will
 promote by the means which his infinite
 wisdom sees fittest ; and then *we know we have*
our petitions that we desire of him.

What

SERM. What has been said on this subject contains, I think, a just and full answer to the common objection against prayer as unnecessary because of the omniscience of God, his perfect wisdom and unalterable counsels in governing the world: The design of informing him of our wants, of affecting his mind in the same manner as the minds of men are affected with the distresses of others, and persuading him to alter his measures, are not the proper designs of prayer; and if it can serve no other, it ought to be given up as useless; but, I hope, it appears that other valuable ends are to be answered by it. It is in itself a very reasonable service, as being an intended deliberate acknowledgement of the divine perfections, power, wisdom, and goodness, in ruling the world; and an expression of our confidence in God, which is an eminent branch of piety, the foundation of our present peace, and our expectation of a happy event, whatever circumstances we may be in; and it is an excellent means of virtue; consequently, of the highest perfection and happiness of human nature; it tends to render us more and more the qualified objects of the divine favour, by increasing and strengthening those good qualities and dispositions to which it is annexed.

The immutability of the divine counsels S E R M.
does not destroy all free-agency in inferior XI.
beings, nor the proper use of their powers in
order, to accomplish the ends for which they
were appointed. No man reasons after this
manner, that because the issues of things are
under the dominion of providence, therefore
we need to do nothing ourselves, but abide
the event of an irresistible decree ;—Because
the fertility of the earth depends on the will
of the supreme cause, therefore we need use
no labour that it may yield its increase ;—Be-
cause there is an appointed time for man upon
earth, and our days are determined, therefore
all means and care on our part for health
and the preservation of life, are unnecessary.
The wisdom of God governs the creatures ac-
cording to the several powers and capacities
he has given them ; inanimate things are
moved according to the direction of his sove-
reign all-powerful will ; and the determina-
tions which are planted in voluntary agents
are as truly the means of providence for ac-
complishing their proper ends as the necessary
motions of the other. The liberty of man in
the exercise of his faculties, according to the
direction of his instincts and his reason, is as
necessary to the happiness and the beauty of
the moral world, as the constant revolution
of

SERM. of the heavenly orbs is to the order of the vi-

XI. fible system. Tho' piety and virtue are practised by men freely and of their own choice, yet by the divine constitution and the unalterable nature of things, the ends of our beings and our happiness can no more be attained without them, than the vegetables of the earth can be brought to perfection without the heat of the sun. 'Tis true, God is willing to make men happy; but to their enjoyment of happiness moral qualifications in them are required, and for the want of them they are unavoidably unhappy; which qualifications depend on the exercise of their own powers. Now, if the necessity of piety and virtue, of the love and fear of God, of trusting in him and doing good, if, I say, the necessity of these, notwithstanding the unchangeableness of the divine counsels and purposes, be once established, it will appear that the means of piety and virtue are, I do not say equally, but in proportion to the degree of their influence and usefulness, also necessary and fit to be used: and I have shewn that prayer is such a means. In one word, God will always do what is most fit and reasonable whether we ask it or not, indeed whether we perform any part of our duty or not; but the fitness of our obtaining his favour, and the happiness which
is

is most suitable to our nature, depends chiefly S E R M.
upon our qualifications; and they are sum- XI.
med up in that temper and those dispositions
of mind which are expressed in, and increased
by fervent prayer, from a pure and upright
heart, with understanding.

F I N I S.

